

Wild

SURVEYS:

TENTS

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEMS

AUSTRALIA & WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Summer
(January–March) 1998, no 67
\$7.50* NZ \$9.50 incl GST

TRACK NOTES:

HOWQUA RIVER

BARRINGTON TOPS—EASIER WALKING

EPIC NEW GUINEA TREK



CANOE RESCUE

TASMANIA'S REMOTEST RIVER?

BUSHWALKING:

BASIC FOOD FOR THE BUSH

HISTORIC VICTORIAN ALPS WALK

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS



ISSN 1030-469X



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Matt Meinhardt

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WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.

Cover This is no time for a spa! Kluane National Park, Yukon, Canada. *Dorian Moro*

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Jobs for the boys

...and damn the rest
of the world

Successive Australian governments, both State and Federal, hardly have the best credentials in environmental matters. Their record, particularly that of the conservative governments, is viewed by many as abysmal. To date they have been able to confine the fallout largely within Australia. The world has remained blissfully unaware of our forest follies and mining madness; that we are 'selling off the family farm'. Nor is the world aware that our wealthy society is not doing this because of necessity, but for motives of greed.

But recent events have made it clear that short-term economic development is the main concern of the Howard Government. Not only has it refused—in the name of protecting Australian jobs and an indeterminate level of overseas investment—to cooperate with a responsible international community by committing itself significantly to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, but government spin doctors have sought to discredit the notion of global warming in general and the contribution of greenhouse emissions to it in particular, all with an eye to the Government's prospects for re-election.

For a while Minister for the Environment Robert Hill sought to avoid embarrassing journalistic probing on the issue. He would prefer to 'concentrate on "results"', as he phrased it. We waited impatiently to hear what these examples of environmental 'peace in our time' might be: progress on the issues of 'native-forest logging' and 'extinctions', we were assured. If Australia has made any major advances in reversing the alarming trend of extinctions of its fauna and flora during the two years of the Howard Government, they have escaped me. With regard to logging, including in East Gippsland, Victoria, it has shown itself to be particularly unwilling to halt the destruction of old-growth forests for woodchip export.

In a special feature on global warming on 18 October 1997 Melbourne's *Age* newspaper gave no less than 17 current examples of its effects on plants and wildlife and 13 examples from around the world of its physical impacts. As the *Age* put it: 'The vast majority of scientists agree that the world is warming up due to an increase in so-called greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane in the earth's atmosphere.'

While a few scientists argue that the global warming effect is unproven, in 1995 2000 leading scientists on the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that "the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate". The *Age* reported that greenhouse gas emissions come from two major sources: electricity generation (about 30 per cent) and land clearing (about 20 per cent).

The cry 'but jobs will be lost' has been used to defend the most questionable practices, among them the arms trade and, locally, the wood-chipping of Australia's old-growth native forests. This time the public, you and I, must take a stand. We must send a message to the government; we must call its bluff. This is serious stuff, and we may not get too many more chances to effect a sea change regarding this crucial issue, of which the effects on our small planet are nothing now compared with what they will be. It is up to us to ensure that this will not become another case of what leading UK rockclimber Jonny Woodward would describe 'a short term gain for some and a long term loss for many more'.

In March 1993 Rod Ansell, who is credited with having inspired the film character 'Crocodile Dundee', wrote from his home in the Northern Territory's outback to the people of Melbourne by means of the *Age's* Letters to the Editor:

The power of our society lies in political clout and votes. Numerically the power is here and in other cities of the world...I hope you care enough and I hope some part of you remembers Eden.

Let's write to our local Members of Parliament telling them that we both care and remember.

Chris Baxter

Environmental impact statement

Wild is printed on Monza paper, which is made of 35 per cent pre-consumer waste and 15 per cent post-consumer waste that has been recycled and oxygen bleached. The cover has a water-based varnish (not an environmentally detrimental UV or plastic finish). We recycle the film used in the printing process. Wild staff run an environmentally aware office. Waste paper is recycled, printer ribbons are re-used, waste is kept to an absolute minimum; even tea bags are reused until they no longer give colour to boiling water! We invite your comments and recommendations; please contact the Managing Editor.

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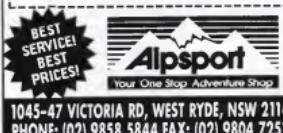
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lub doubt

Coast and Mountain Walkers come out of the woodwork to set the record straight

As an early member of the Coast and Mountain Walkers (1936-39) and at one time its secretary, I read the article in *Wild* no 66 with a great deal of nostalgic interest, but I wish to draw attention to a couple of inaccuracies.

The ladders on Clear Hill which had been installed by Taro and some of his Sydney Bush Walker colleagues had become hazardous—if not dangerous—in 1939, especially as the bushfires had burnt some of the timber saplings. This was the subject of discussion between Frank Craft of the Warrigal Club and myself during a visit to the locality. I was not then a member of the CMW and had joined the Warrigal Club...

Frank Craft was living at Lithgow in the years 1930-40 and in discussion between us the idea emerged of replacing the decaying ladders with something more durable which would resist bushfires and facilitate the descent of Clear Hill. Frank undertook to procure a drill and a series of steel loops to be set in the rock-face and I agreed to supply some long bolts sufficiently strong to stand the weight of an average walker.

The two of us arranged to meet at Katoomba on a Friday night and to spend the weekend fixing the steel loops and bolts in the rock wall. We debated the method of fixing and decided on using cement rather than some sulphur additive as had been done at Carlons Head. I was the unlucky one who volunteered to carry the best part of half a bag of cement from Katoomba to Clear Hill but Frank Craft had an equally heavy load with an 18-inch steel drill and a seven-pound hammer as well as the steel loops...

As I was then no longer a member of the CMW it is not accurate to say as the article claims that 'the CMW replaced the ladder with steel rungs set into the cliff in the early 1940s'. The idea and its execution belongs exclusively to the Warrigal Club of which both Frank Craft and I were members in the 1940s until that club ceased active functioning owing to the Second World War...

One other matter of detail needing correction in the article is that the walker on the far right of the photograph on page 69 is Trevor Martin, not T Mark. Trevor was a close friend of mine but was not a

member of the CMW; he was a distinguished classical scholar from the University of Sydney and later graduated with honours in Law and was made a Queens Counsel and in 1973 a District Court judge. He died a couple of years ago.

Rae Else-Mitchell
Deakin, ACT

I found Brian Walker's article on the history of the Coast and Mountain Walkers (*Wild* no 66) most interesting. It well describes the background and culture of one of our long-established clubs.

However, I would like to correct the statement that the CMW was a foundation member of the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs. While the CMW was indeed formed in 1934, the federation was inaugurated at a meeting on 21 July 1932. According to the surviving records, the nine foundation clubs were the Mountain Trails Club, the Sydney Bush Walkers, the Hikers Club of Sydney, the NSW Amateur Walking Club, the Bushlanders Club of NSW, the Workers Educational Association, the Ramblers Club, the YMCA Ramblers Club and the Bush Tracks Club of Wagga.

We have just commemorated the 65th birthday of the federation, and also of the Blue Gum Forest. [See article beginning on page 46 of this issue. Editor] That is no coincidence: the energy generated by the forest campaign of 1931-32 was a major catalyst in getting the clubs together.

Andy Macqueen
Springwood, NSW

The Coast and Mountain Walkers has an interesting history, as Brian Walker's article in *Wild* no 66 shows, and John Horrocks's description of joining a 'great, raucous, rowdy mob' in the early 1960s is right on.

But a key point about CMW has been lost. It was a club in which women were treated as normal people—a seminal learning experience for me, a young male emerging from the 1950s when I joined.

The impression left by the article is unfortunate and untrue of CMW. Women were not only editors, secretaries and conservationists. Bushwalking is significant because it is a physical and social activity in which women can take part and take the lead without discrimination.

Jean Edgecombe's OAM is mentioned—how about a bit on her history as a walker? One would think that John Bednal wasn't married to Gwen Bednal, recent president of CMW and as strong a walker as any.

Ninian Melville, smiling Napoleon that he was, ran a teenage section which encouraged women walkers such as my wife, then Margaret Hailstone, the first woman to complete the Three Peaks in the required 48 hours and still an avid walker and regular leader for the Canberra Bushwalking Club. And what about Sue Hope, who climbed Federation in a weekend in the early 1960s. And so on...

CMW's story has been left half untold.
Frank McKone
Holt, ACT

• Wronglines

I just read the first letter in *Wild* no 66 and cannot let it pass without comment.

'All of us will effectively not be able to travel...as we presently can on pastoral lease...' I do not know the rules which apply in all States but I do know the situation in the Northern Territory and Western Australia which account for a rather large proportion of the area under pastoral lease in Australia. The public has no right of access in either. If the pastoralist gives you permission to enter a particular part of the property, you may do so. If not, you are guilty of trespass and may be prosecuted.

'...the reality on existing Aboriginal lands is that such permits are usually not granted without "good" reason...' The reality is that, at least in the NT, ease of access varies just as much from one piece of Aboriginal land to another as it does from one pastoral lease to another. Getting permission for a bushwalk in Arnhem Land is difficult. Getting permission for a bushwalk on some Aboriginal lands is easy. The author seems to think that National Parks are accessible. Huge areas in National Parks may be no more accessible to bushwalkers than Aboriginal lands or pastoral leases. The whole of the Prince Regent Nature Reserve in WA is legally out of bounds to the general public. Kakadu is the largest National Park in Australia. If you want to do a walk along an officially approved route (less than five per cent of the park), you will have no problem

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in getting a permit. If you want to do a walk elsewhere, you may have to wait months or years to get a reply and then that answer may still be 'No'. Kakadu is the extreme case, but bushwalking access in many of the other NT parks is limited to certain areas.

I have not done the research necessary to do every i and cross every t but my understanding of the NT pastoral leases is that Aboriginal people have certain specific rights under the terms of those leases and that Native Title merely confirms these rights. If a pastoralist has the right to give or deny you permission to enter the lease now, he or she will have the same right even if a Native Title claim is successful.

I suspect that what is most likely to deny access to the bushwalking public is the inevitable court cases which will drag on over the next 10, 20 or 100 years. The only winners in the coming battle are the lawyers.

(Name withheld)

NT

by myself. I'll certainly keep on doing them, encouraged by the likes of Lesley and Kevin.

John I'Ons
Kambah, ACT

Take a proper gander

I was disappointed with the limited view expressed in the 'Prom set-back' item in *Wild* no 66, with its misleading 'propaganda' cartoon, in an otherwise balanced and well-produced magazine, eagerly awaited each season. As a regular hiker at Wilsons Promontory, Victoria, over the last 20 years, I was concerned to hear of the proposed commercial plans of 'destruction'. The popular media and fellow hikers alike reported Victorian Government designs to destroy the Prom for ever. My own investigation during a recent visit found that the issue is not black and white. The Tidal River area is placed under extreme seasonal pressure by thousands of feet, vans and tents in the warmer months and all but

walking track even if the plans to revegetate current four-wheel-drive tracks in the north of the park and downgrade the vehicle track to the lighthouse to a walking track are implemented.

The *Tidal River Master Plan* available from Parks Victoria (or the Prom office) must be read by all Prom lovers. Conservation in the face of public demand requires proactive thinking. The 'hands off' approach ignores the long-term environmental impact of doing nothing. I strongly encourage readers to write the letters and make the phone calls, but first be sure that you know the facts. You'll be taken more seriously.

Timothy Adams
Box Hill North, Vic

A momentary lapse of reason

Is \$107.50 a record price for a single copy of *Wild*? I went to the newsagent to buy some envelopes, caught sight of *Wild* no 65, dipped into it, became engrossed in the control-freak's approach to camping, bought it, decided a good cup of coffee was the perfect accompaniment, became lost on the Bluff in heavy weather, and emerged to find myself ten minutes (\$100) overdue on a clearway! Obviously, I should never have let my subscription lapse...

Anne Neale
Brunswick East, Vic

Us and them

In Green Pages, *Wild* no 65, an item refers to the Wollemi, New South Wales, and the increase in walking tracks, abseiling bolts, and so on. I have been bushwalking, canyoning and abseiling in the Blue Mountains and associated areas for many years and unfortunately some areas are suffering from overuse. However, this does not warrant the closing of all remote canyoning, abseiling and walking tracks. I have been a frequent user of a particular abseiling route in the Blue Mountains that has recently been closed. I have not observed any degradation of the area. The number of parties visiting this remote track would total five a week in peak season (a logbook of visitors is available on the track). However, certain routes in the heart of the Blue Mountains, such as the Three Sisters, are subject to four or five parties at a time queuing up to use the route yet these tracks (which, I might add, are used by local adventure companies) are allowed to remain open.

I hope that some sense can be applied to management of our remote areas in that a route should be closed because the route threatens the environment. A route should not be closed just because it is in a wilderness area, or access tolerated because of its dollar value.

Keep up the good work.

Phil Milner
Merewether, NSW

BUSHWALKING IN THE 4TH DIMENSION...



Alarmed

On reading *Wild* no 64, I was alarmed to see a correspondent write, on page 9, 'the four-dimensional physical topography', as I have lived my life in the belief that there were three dimensions only—to wit, length, height and width...

John Morrison
Burwood, NSW

Lone star state

Congratulations, Lesley Wickham, for your article 'Going it Alone' (*Wild* no 66) and to *Wild* for publishing it. This is the second outstanding story about solo walking to have appeared recently—the other being Kevin Doran's account in *Wild* no 61 of his ascent of Federation Peak. I can just see the rationalists reaching for their pens—you know, all the old arguments about how selfish it is, how dangerous. How boring! I'm 61 and some of my best mountaineering, walking and biking trips have been

deserted in winter. Areas of the Prom accessible only on foot are not nearly as traumatised (perhaps this is a reflection of the attitudes of those willing to carry a pack?)

It is naïve and unrealistic to imagine that this pressure on the environment and facilities at Tidal River will diminish without some active management strategies (other than erecting a huge 'Keep Out' sign advocated by some). The goal of relocating most of the services currently situated at Tidal River to the Yankie gateway and making this area the 'base' for visitors, thus reducing the pressure on Tidal River, is an excellent one. The reduction in camp-sites at Tidal River and the provision of more 'roofed' accommodation are part of the plan to ease the environmental pressure by encouraging some of the summer hordes to defer their stay until winter. These plans were not mentioned in your article.

I do, however, have some doubts about the necessity for a new south-eastern

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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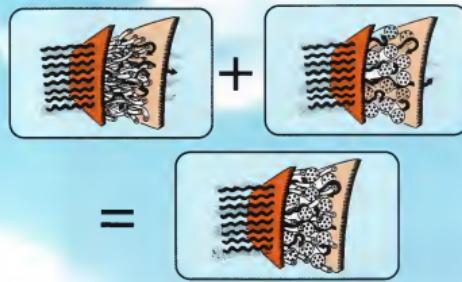
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Total Weight: 1.50kg ±;
Fill: SuperBlend Q7™; 900g of Dacron® DuPont® 7 hole fibre Type 514 for high loft and 33% Dacron™ single hole macro fibre Type 8s for high density



\$169 RRP

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Temperature: -10°; Size: Generous Adult;
Design: Ergonomic; Total Weight: 1.75kg ±;
Fill: SuperBlend Q7™; 900g of Dacron® DuPont® 7 hole fibre Type 514 for high loft and 33% Dacron™ single hole macro fibre Type 8s for high density and Microfibre. 970g



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Lock up

Andrew Lock's Himalayan success



● **Australian solos 8000er**

Sydney mountaineer Andrew Lock made an ascent of international importance in August when he reached the summit of Broad Peak (8047 metres) in Pakistan's Karakoram range unaccompanied and without supplementary oxygen. His ascent of the mountain (which he has climbed before) was among the most impressive made by an Australian.

An initial attempt to climb a new route on Broad Peak in lightweight, 'alpine' style with UK climber Rick Allen failed at 7100 metres when progress was halted by a 300 metre high ice-cliff. After Allen returned home, Lock turned his attention to the mountain's deserted West Face and set out on 6 August to reach the summit alone, without bottled oxygen, a tent or a sleeping-bag. He summited at noon on 7 August after a brief, sleepless bivouac at 6900 metres and was back at Base Camp by 8 pm the following day after enduring another cold night on the mountain.

Lock (who was featured in Quentin Chester's article 'Dark Horses and Black Sheep' in *Wild* no 60) climbed Nepal's Dhaulagiri (8167 metres) with an Australian expedition in May. In 1993 he became the third Australian (after Greg Mortimer and Greg Child) to climb K2 (8611 metres)—the most respected and second-highest mountain in the world.

● **President James**

Prominent Sydney caver Julia James was elected president of the International Union of Speleology at that body's World Congress, which was held in Switzerland in August. It is the first time an Australian caver has held this honour. Also at the congress Ernie Holland, Jenolan Caves (New South Wales) head guide, was elected chairman of the IUS Commission on Show Caves of the World.

In May cavers led by Sydney University's Keir Vaughan-Taylor made an exciting discovery when they 'pushed' the main

tourist caves at Jenolan to within 300 metres of Mammoth Cave, traversing significant sections of new passage. The link-up of the two sets of caves has been a Holy Grail of Jenolan cavers for some years and—should it occur—would confirm the system as the longest surveyed cave in Australia at more than 31 kilometres.

Exploring the subterranean route of the Jenolan River is an arduous process which entails scuba-diving through long sections of flooded passage.

● **Corrections and amplifications**

Wild no 66: The Ezidri 500-watt food dehydrator referred to in Monica Chapman's article 'Dry Your Own Food' on page 64

WIDE MOUTH G

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has five trays (not four). The weights in the Wild Gear Survey table of down sleeping bags were rounded to the nearest 50 grams (not 100 grams as stated on page 87). The Mont day-and-a-half packs listed in the Equipment survey on page 99 are manufactured in Fiji (not Korea). The Swiss-tech Tough 5-in-1 tool was incorrectly captioned on page 101. Its name is actually Swiss-Tech 5-in-1.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Silver screen

The second International Adventure Film Festival is to be held on 13–15 March 1998 at the Thredbo Alpine Hotel, New South Wales. A multitude of outdoors activities including canyoning and extreme skiing will feature in the films, most of which will never be seen on TV. The event is being organised by well-known film maker Glenn Singleman. For more information, contact the Thredbo Resort Centre on its Free Call number: 1800 020 589.

VICTORIA

Ski advice

With only the odd snowdrift remaining high in the Australian Alps, ski-tourers and Telemarkers can only look forward to next winter. In the meantime a small booklet available from the Ski Touring Association of Victoria (phone 03 9553 4496 for a copy) contains informative reading and advice—particularly if you're just starting out in ski-touring. *A Handbook of Cross-Country Skiing in Victoria* is not definitive by any means (nor is it of interest exclusively

to Victorians) but supplies guidance for selecting appropriate gear and how to plan a ski trip. This booklet is intended to replace the series of leaflets published by the STAV many years ago.

Hopping with excitement

The 1997 Kangaroo Hoppet was held at Falls Creek in late August and was an exciting and memorable event. Three skiers approached the final hill neck and neck after

skiing 42 kilometres in almost perfect conditions. To the cheers of the large crowd all three dashed across the line within the same second. Paul Gray outsprinted the other two to become the first Australian to win a World Loppet event, in the blistering time of 1 hour, 43 minutes, 7.5 seconds. Gray and second placed Byung Chul Park of Korea collapsed on the snow while third place-getter Anthony Evans of Australia sagged on to his poles panting like a bellows.



Winners of the 1997 Kangaroo Hoppet men's event: Anthony Evans (third), left, Paul Grey (first), and Korea's Byung Chul Park. Michael Hampton

Wild Diary

Information about rucksack-sports events for publication in this department should be sent to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

December			
27–31 Mars Murray Marathon C	Vic	(03) 9685 9813	
January 1998			
3 Introductory sea kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
15–16 Basic skills training C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332	
30– Basic skills assessment C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332	
31– Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
February			
6–8 Basic skills instructor intake C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
7 Sea kayak instructor assessment	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
7–8 Basic skills instructor intake C	ACT	(02) 6288 5610	
12–13 Basic skills assessment C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332	
14 6-hour R	Vic	(03) 9890 4352	
14–15 Basic skills instructor intake C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
15 Update Down 12-hour R	WA	(08) 9381 8608	
21–22 Introduction to sea kayaking	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	

February (continued)			
23 Metrogaine 6-hour R	Qld	(07) 3369 1641	
28 River rescue course C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
28– Cradle to Coast	Tas	(03) 6244 5222	
2 Mar Ultra Challenge M			

March			
1 Proficiency testing C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
8 Metrogaine 6-hour R	NSW	(02) 9816 2508	
14 Metrogaine 6-hour R	SA	(08) 8364 4390	
14–15 Basic skills assessment C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332	
Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
Vic Championships 12- and 24-hour R	Vic	(03) 9890 4352	
22 Paddy Pallin 6-hour R	ACT	(02) 6248 7142	
28–29 River rescue course C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
White-water instructor assessment C	ACT	(02) 6288 5610	

April			
3–5 Basic skills instructor intake C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
18 River rescue course C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
19 Proficiency testing C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277	
25–26 VCC beginners' and lead-climbing course (week one) RC	Vic	(03) 9428 5298	

B bushwalking C canoeing M multisports R rogaining RC rockclimbing S skiing

The locals were in for a further treat when the women's event was dominated by three Australians. Camille Melvey crossed the line in 2 hours, 6 minutes, 57.7 seconds; she was followed by Lyn Maree Crangan and Jenny Atttermatt.

The visiting Korean squad cleaned up in the 21 kilometre Birkebeiner, however. Byung Joo Park was first in a time of 54 minutes, 37.6 seconds; with Sung Won Yoon second and Paul Murray of Australia just over a minute behind him. Korean women took the first three places in their event: Myung Jung Koon (1 hour, 6 minutes, 20.9 seconds), followed by Chun Ja Lee and Jung Ja Han.

Young Australians dominated the seven kilometre Joey Hoppet. Michael Evans was the fastest male at 17 minutes, 8.5 seconds; with Andrew Johnston and Daniel Sarri second and third, respectively. In the women's division Katie Calder and Esther Bottomley had to settle for second and third, respectively, behind Natasha Coleman who completed the quarter-distance course in 20 minutes, 20.1 seconds.

This year's event was also memorable because the full, and revised, course was used for the first time since 1994. Race organisers and skiers 'lucked out' with the weather, with good snow showers the previous weekend and white-outs and rain the day after the race. However, many of the ruck following in the wake of the elite and faster skiers found the combination of fast downhills and rugged grooming quite a challenge and there was much comparing of bruises after the race.

Michael Hampton

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the big event

fancy a holiday bushwalking, white-water rafting, mountain biking, abseiling and even horse-riding and sea kayaking? Sounds like fun? Well, 'fun' probably wasn't quite the word used by most of the participants in the 1997 Eco-Challenge which was held in north Queensland in August.

Forty-eight teams from 15 nations started out from the Undara lava caves on a 528 kilometre course which was dubbed 'the world's toughest adventure race'. With hardly any sleep, 19 masochists—er... I mean competitors—paddled, ran, swam, rode and climbed their way non-stop across crocodile-infested gorges, dense rainforest, mountain tops, waterfalls and rough seas. Not surprisingly, 19 teams failed to finish due to injuries, exhaustion or having to be rescued. As it was, almost all the competitors suffered from severe blisters and 20 required intravenous rehydration treatment. Surprisingly, only one competitor was hospitalised due to moderate hypothermia.

First across the line, and \$25 000 richer, was the New Zealand/USA Team Eco-Internet (John Howard [NZ], Keith and Andrea Murray [NZ], and Robert Nagle [US]) in an almost unbelievable time of 5 days, 19 hours. Team Eco-Internet won last year's event in British Columbia and should be hot favourites in Morocco next year. The Aussies in Team Pure Energy (Ian Adamson, Jane Hall, Andy Hislop and John Jacoby) put in a spectacular effort by finishing second in just 5 days, 21 hours. To put this into perspective, Team New York's Finest—members of the tough New York Police Department—took 10 days, 4 hours.

Lucas Trickey assisting an exhausted member of the Irish team high over the Herbert River Falls, north Queensland, during the 1997 Eco-Challenge. Glenn Tempest

Permits introduced

Walkers planning to walk the wilderness coastline of Croajingolong National Park and the adjoining Cape Conran Coastal Park in Victoria's far east will now be required to apply for permits. The permit system was introduced in August and is intended to complement the existing permit requirements for walking in the neighbouring Nardoo Nature Reserve in New South Wales. The cost is \$5.00 a person a night. It may be necessary to book ahead for peak periods, such as Easter. Contact the local information centre in Mallacoota on (03) 5158 0219 or in Cann River, on (03) 5158 6351.

TASMANIA

Cave quake

Mole Creek was recently the epicentre of one of the largest earthquakes ever to rock the State. Many, if not all, of the area's caves suffered some damage but it would appear that there have not been any major

before the event competitors and media were joined by the local Cairns community to participate in a clean-up of nearby Freshwater Creek, which also marked the start of the Clean Up Australia 2001 project.

If you want to know just how some people prefer to spend their holidays, Discovery Channel filmed the event for a five-hour miniseries (reported to be the largest documentary-film production ever undertaken in Australia) which will be aired globally in 1998.

Glenn Tempest



collapses or significant changes to the cave passages (although not all the caves have been visited since the quake).

Stephen Burton

OVERSEAS

A peak by any other name...

The famous name of New Zealand's highest mountain is set to change as a result of a new agreement between the government and Maori leaders. On 24 September a draft deed of settlement under the 148-year-old Treaty of Waitangi was announced; the deed includes \$170 million compensation for Maori grievances and the return of Mt Cook—soon to be known as Aoraki—Mt Cook—to its traditional owners, who will then hand it back to the nation. Legislation confirming the deal was expected to pass the NZ Parliament in November.

The origin and significance of the peak to the local Ngai Tahu tribe is found in that people's lore. The term Aorangi—'cloud in

the sky'—is one of the best known names in New Zealand. (Aoraki is the South Island tribes' pronunciation.)

The peak was first seen by early European mariners but not until March 1851 was it named by Captain Stokes of the *Adheron* in honour of James Cook who, strangely, does not seem to have sighted the peak on either of his two journeys along the west coast of the South Island.

Geoff Wayatt

The big paddle

Those who read Wild Information in *Wild* no 64 will know of the attempt by Australian John Hoelscher and his companion Lonnie Dupre of the US to be the first people to circumnavigate the frozen island of Greenland by kayak and dog sled. In August Hoelscher and Dupre completed the first leg of their journey, a paddle of 2000 kilometres and 85 days from Paamiut near the southern tip of the island to the Qaanaaq district on the north-west coast—reportedly the longest Arctic kayak journey ever completed in a single season. In February the pair will begin the next stage of their gruelling expedition, a dog-sled journey traversing Greenland's northern and eastern coastlines.

World's longest Tyrolean traverse

As a follow-up to the 12th International Congress of Speleology mentioned earlier, the Slovenian Speleological Society organised an 848 metre Tyrolean traverse 340 metres above Zadiel Gorge in Slovakia. The traverse utilised a single length of specially constructed 12 millimetre superstatic rope rated to hold a force of seven kilonewtons when loaded. Most of the participants, or 'creepers' as they became known, completed the crossing in approximately half an hour although the fastest creeper took only 8 minutes, 32 seconds. The event was watched by about 15 000 onlookers and one creeper even turned BASE jumper in mid-crossing!

SB

More steps to watch

Cave exploration in the former Yugoslavia continues at a pace with more remarkable finds, this time in Croatia, where another long pitch has been discovered. Although not eclipsing the Vrtiglavica pitch in Slovenia (see *Wild* no 65) the 553 metre shaft called Patrko Gusti discovered on Mt Velebit is now second on the list of the world's longest cave pitches. SB

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Send them to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



VERVE

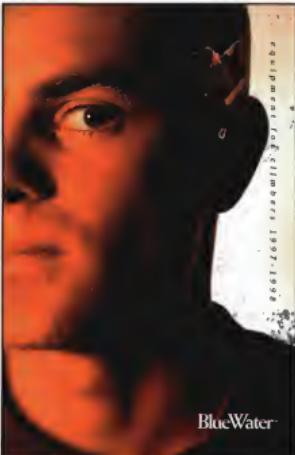


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Kakadu uranium mine gets the nod

● **Kakadu undermined?**

The worst fears of conservationists were realised in October when the Federal Government gave preliminary approval for the construction of a new uranium mine in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Conservationists have vowed to mount a major campaign to protest the construction of the mine. (See box on page 23 for more information.)

Meanwhile the CSIRO has warned of the dangers of ecosystem disturbance caused by the pumping of groundwater from mines in arid, semi-arid and tropical areas. Millions of litres of water are pumped annually from mines in Australia's north, many of which abut National Parks or other sensitive areas. The pooling of this water at the surface can produce 'artificial rainforests' and waterholes with exotic or ephemeral species which may out-compete the native flora and fauna and seriously upset the balance of the ecosystem.

● **In the greenhouse doghouse**

Australia continued to draw criticism from environmentalists, scientists and many of the world's nations over its stance on global warming in the lead-up to the Kyoto environment conference in December. Australia rejects the need for binding targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and instead insists that countries with economies which rely heavily on polluting industries be exempt from much of the burden of such reductions.

In mid-October Greenpeace activists protesting at Australia's position on both global warming and the development of alternative energy sources caused an uproar when they raided the Prime Minister's Sydney residence and perched on the roof for several hours. The activists 'installed' solar panels (which they later offered to give to the Prime Minister) on the building before surrendering to police. Sad to say, the offer of a free solar-power system was refused.

● **Biodiversity dwindling?**

Thirty-one species were added to Australia's endangered list in August, including the spot-tailed quoll which lives in the heart of the logging zones of south-eastern Australia. The status of six species improved from 'endangered' to 'vulnerable', and one—the Tasmanian emu, which has not had a



confirmed sighting for more than 50 years—was declared officially extinct. Action plans will now be drawn up to aid in protecting the new additions to the endangered list. Habitat destruction and predation by feral animals continue to be major reasons for the decline in native populations of rare animals.

● **Here, fishy fishy...**

Greenpeace is focusing its attention on the destructive practices of industrial fishing fleets and the resulting impact on marine life. The southern blue-fin tuna is just one commercially valuable species which has been decimated by such practices—it is estimated that stocks of this fish have declined by 98 per cent since 1960. Greenpeace observes that in many parts of the world fishing restrictions are being ignored by both commercial operators and governments.

In October the Australian Navy boarded several vessels fishing illegally for the valuable Patagonian tooth-fish in Australian Antarctic waters; French warships are also in the area to defend that country's fishing zones from South American poachers.

Mirrar traditional owners showed their feelings about the proposed uranium mine by unfurling this banner on the Jabiluka escarpment, Northern Territory, on World Environment Day. *Sandy Sheltima*

To join Greenpeace in its opposition to unsustainable fishing, see Action Box item 1.

● **Whale of a park**

The Federal Government has announced its intention to expand marine reserves in the Great Australian Bight. The new parks will include a narrow strip of ocean and seabed extending from the coast to the edge of Australian territorial waters, in which disruptive activities will largely be forbidden. A three-nautical-mile zone parallel to the shore will be established as a Marine Park while other zones in adjacent waters will provide more limited protection, particularly for breeding whales, but will still be venues for commercial fishing and other activities for much of the year.

Something a Marine Park cannot prevent is the death and injury of countless

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sea creatures—including large mammals such as whales and seals—caused by plastic bags and other refuse. Greens Senator Bob Brown has called on the Federal Government to follow the lead of nations such as Germany by charging a fee for every plastic bag sold, to restrict the use of plastic on seagoing vessels and to levy heavy fines on people dumping plastic material into the ocean.

QUEENSLAND

Du-gone?

The dugong population near Hinchinbrook Island is facing a new threat from a second marina development adjacent to the animals' prime habitat. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council has approved the construction of a 50-berth marina with associated accommodation and shops at Dungeness near the southern tip of the island, 100 kilometres north of Townsville and 40 kilometres south of the controversial Port Hinchinbrook development.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Parks or speedways?

The National Parks Association of NSW is alarmed at the contents of the *Draft Access Strategy* for National Parks released for comment by NSW Minister for the Environment Pam Allan. NPANSW Executive Director Noel Plumb claims that the strategy is 'clearly focused on responding to the vociferous lobbying of a small number of high-impact users (the 4WD and horse-riding lobbies), and paving the way for greater emphasis on commercial tourism and commercial operations in the parks'. Specific concerns include the ongoing discussions between the government and four-wheel-drive clubs about 'controlled access' to National Park management roads, the reduction in size of wilderness declarations—particularly the recent Wollemi declaration—to placate high-impact users, and the 'implication that more built accommodation should be placed in parks'. A coalition of groups which includes the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs of NSW, the Wilderness Society and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, are opposing the thrust of the plan. To join them, see Action Box item 2.

jabiluka—no time to waste

About 250 kilometres east of Darwin lies a significant concentration of uranium. The mining company Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) wants to mine this deposit. Its name is Jabiluka and the debate over whether or not to mine it is turning into a major environmental struggle with very high stakes.

At present there are two functional uranium mines in Australia. Western Mining Corporation operates the Olympic Dam/Roxby Downs mine in northern South Australia and ERA runs a mine called Ranger about 20 kilometres from the Jabiluka site in Kakadu. Both operations have resulted in the accumulation of large volumes of radioactive mine tailings and wastes and have had an environmental impact in the adjacent area as well as causing concern about occupational and community health and safety. There has been extensive leakage from WMC's tailings dam at Roxby and the mine consumes artesian water in Australia's driest region. In Kakadu, environment groups have recorded numerous incidents at Ranger since 1980 and there is a continuing seepage problem from the radioactive tailings dam and routine releases of mine-site contaminants into the surrounding waterways and wetlands.

The site of the proposed mine is ecologically—albeit not technically—part of Kakadu, which is Australia's largest National Park. It is adjacent to wetlands and rock-art sites on the World Heritage List. The proposed development is unequivocally opposed by the Mirrar people, the region's traditional Aboriginal owners, who are taking action through the Federal Court and the Paris-based World Heritage Committee to stop the development. Formal and informal polling indicates that the majority of the Australian community is not in favour of a uranium mine at Jabiluka.

It seems increasingly clear that the Federal Government is ideologically and politically com-



Ranger mine and tailings dam, NT. Note their proximity to the Kakadu escarpment, behind. The tailings contain 80 per cent of the radioactivity of the original ore body and must be isolated from the surrounding environment for more than 200 000 years. *Sheltema*

mitted to encouraging non-renewable resource extraction projects regardless of sound environmental management. A push for a uranium mine in a National Park that enjoys the highest level of international recognition for its cultural and natural values is proof of this.

As the pressure to mine Jabiluka increases, so too does the campaign to resist this inherently dangerous industry and to protect the

VICTORIA

Government 'lacks vision'

The Victorian Government announced in October that it is to purchase a 1277 hectare block of relatively untouched native grassland in the north of the State and add it to the adjacent Terrick Terrick State Park. The announcement was made at a conference on the future of the State's National Parks organised by the Victorian National Parks Association and attended by more than 200 delegates including environmentalists, academics, rangers, bureaucrats and the public. The conference asserted the principle that parks should be managed primarily for the conservation of nature, with recreation and other activities only permitted where they did not conflict with the needs of conservation. Speakers warned of the dangers of commercial development, insisting that 'there is no place for the profit motive in National Parks'. Wild Environmentalist of the Year and former VNPA director Doug Humann summed up the proceedings with an appeal for the supporters of National Parks loudly to voice their opinions on management issues, particularly to legislators. Humann criticised the State Government, saying that despite the participation of Parks Victoria at the conference and a speech by Minister for Conservation Marie

country and the culture of this unique region. Environment groups including the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, the Northern Territory Environment Centre and the Wilderness Society are working to stop this proposal from becoming a reality. Environmentalists are also working closely with the Mirrar people and support their views on this proposal. The campaign is active and growing and is intended to send a clear message to the government and to ERA that mining at Jabiluka is not necessary, safe or acceptable. Kakadu, and Australia, deserve far better. It's up to you to let the government know your views.

Take a stand—see Action Box item 7.
Dave Sweeney

The VNPA needs your support

Have you ever

- Camped in the Alpine NP?
- Canoed in the Snowy River NP?
- Rockclimbed in the Grampians NP?
- Walked the coastal wilderness at Croajingolong NP?



The Victorian National Parks Association has been the major force behind the creation of these parks and much of Victoria's excellent system of parks and reserves.

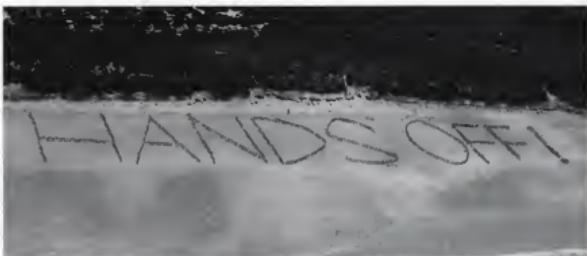
The VNPA is a non-profit, non-government, nature conservation organisation formed in 1952. Since that time the area of Victoria dedicated to national, state and wilderness parks has risen from 127,011 to 2,942,073 hectares, and the number of parks from 16 to 70.

Now, more than ever, these precious natural areas are at risk. Threats include mineral exploration in Chiltern NP, roading through remote areas in Mallee parks, woodchipping in native forests, ski resort expansion at Mt Hotham and Falls Creek, and, of course, private commercial development at Wilsons Promontory NP (see Green Pages and Editorial in this issue of *Wild*).

The VNPA works on many conservation issues other than parks, including those of marine, native grasslands, box-ironbark forests, alpine areas and the Central Highlands. The VNPA also hosts the Marine and Coastal Community Network and the Threatened Species Network.

'Hands off The Prom'

The VNPA's effectiveness can be seen from the battle over this park. An intensive campaign spearheading a tide of community opposition has seen the abandonment of a hotel proposal at the Prom. To lead this crucial campaign, the VNPA has dedicated three staff for six months and mobilised a huge pool of volunteers.



Bushwalking and activities programme

The VNPA runs the largest outdoor activities programme in Victoria. In our six-monthly programme you will find descriptions of more than 200 activities—bushwalks; extended tours (Victoria and interstate); Walk, Talk and Gawks; cycling; skiing; canoeing; and excursions to parks. All activities are graded 'easy', 'medium' or 'hard'.

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Tehan the government had shown 'no vision for the future'. A new draft *National Parks Act* is due for release before the end of 1997.

To join the VNPA in opposing commercial intrusions into National Parks, see Action Box item 3.

● Hello, possums!

Environment Victoria is inviting people to help them to find and count remnant populations of the State's endangered faunal emblem, Leadbeater's possum, in the forests of the Central Highlands. Volunteers will be taught how to identify the possums, as well as various species of glider, in the tall mountain-ash forests near Healesville, Warburton and Marysville. The present season of surveys ends in December, but if you're quick you can still get into the action. See Action Box item 4 for details.

● Apostles reprieve

The VNPA welcomed the release in September of a draft management plan for the Port Campbell National Park (which includes the spectacular Twelve Apostles

rock stacks) in the State's south-west. The plan rejects an earlier proposal to develop a privately funded visitors' centre at the Twelve Apostles, a scheme which was strenuously opposed by conservation groups due to its potential impact on the scenic beauty of the area and the worrying precedent it would set for further commercial development in National Parks.

Less enthusiastic, however, was State Premier Jeff Kennett, who immediately criticised the plan and intimated that the development of commercial visitors' infra-

land Track north of Lake St Clair. Helicopters are routinely used to resupply huts along the track, for emergency evacuations and to fly in equipment required for track work.

A new private walkers' hut is to be built at Kia Ora near Mt Ossa, on the Overland Track, by commercial walking-tour operator Cradle Huts. The business already manages a chain of huts along the track, which are used exclusively by commercial tour parties undertaking the famous multi-day walk.



Action Box

Readers can take action on the following matters covered in Green Pages in this issue.

1 Phone the Greenpeace membership line on 1800 815 151.

2 Contact the Total Environment Centre on (02) 9247 4714 or the NPANSW on (02) 9233 4660.

3 Contact the VNPA, 10 Parliament Pl, East Melbourne, Vic 3002; phone (03) 9650 8296.

4 You will need one free Friday or Saturday night, or you may wish to camp for the weekend. For more information, call Ruth at Environment Victoria on (03) 9348 9044.

5 For more information, phone the Wilderness Society on (03) 6234 9366 or contact the Australian Greens on (03) 6234 1633.

6 To support the Australian Bush Heritage Fund, write to PO Box 101, Hobart, Tas 7001; or you should call (03) 6223 2670, fax (03) 6223 2680.

7 There are several useful steps you can take to prevent the mining of more uranium in Kakadu. Write to Prime Minister John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600, and tell him you do *not* want more uranium mining—not in Kakadu, not anywhere! Call or write to your local and State newspapers and inform them of your opposition to more mining. Call or write to your local federal MP to voice your concerns. Ring talk-back radio programmes. Write to ERA. If you have any shares in ERA contact the ACF to discuss this.

The Wanderer River, South-west Tasmania, remains unprotected and is part of an area conservationists are seeking to add to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Geoff Law*

structure near the famous rock stacks was still on the agenda.

● Dirty money

Environment groups handed back thousands of dollars in government grants in August when they made their withdrawal from the Regional Forest Agreement process official. Earlier in the year groups such as the Wilderness Society declared the RFA negotiations (which have resulted in record levels of wood-chips being taken from the State's native forests) a 'sham' designed to appease logging companies in the face of scientific advice urging the protection of important stands of old-growth forest, such as the Goolengook coupe in East Gippsland.

TASMANIA

● Come fly with me...

Some conservationists and bushwalkers are distressed about the construction of a new helipad at Pine Valley Hut near the Over-

● Wilderness wandering

South of Macquarie Harbour and west of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is a large tract of unprotected country, the Wanderer wilderness. (See article beginning on page 50 of this issue of *Wild*.)

The area has been recommended for addition to the WHA by the Parks & Wildlife Service and other authorities; however, successive governments have ignored these requests under pressure from the mining industry. Four-wheel-drive tracks have been cut through the bush and geologists frequently explore the region.

So far the impact has been restricted to erosion and fire damage but should commercial quantities of ore be discovered, the destruction of part of the area could be expected to escalate. The Wilderness Society and Australian Greens are pushing vigorously for the immediate inclusion of the Wanderer wilderness in the WHA. To help them in this cause, see Action Box item 5.

Geoff Law

● Another addition to the treasure chest

The Australian Bush Heritage Fund is set to announce another purchase of valuable Australian bush to be managed for ever for

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Photo by Tristan Everard

nature conservation. The acquisition of 120 hectares on Tasmania's east coast—the Friendly Beaches Reserve near the Freycinet Peninsula—protects coastal sand-dune vegetation and heathlands which on the east coast of Tasmania have been extensively cleared for agriculture and residential purposes. The new reserve also protects and complements the adjacent salt-water lagoon nature reserve, a haven for water birds previously threatened by unsympathetic development.

The ABHF is at present negotiating the purchase of blocks of land in two States and is actively investigating purchases across Australia with a particular focus on the south-east. *Wild* encourages its readers to make tax deductible donations to the ABHF, which also accepts bequests of funds and land. The fund has recently been joined by Doug Humann, current *Wild* Environmentalist of the Year, who has taken up the position of executive director. See Action Box item 6.

Doug Humann

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Cash and karri

Months of forest protest have failed to sway the State Government from its intention to carry out clear-felling in the Giblett forest block in the State's south-west. Protesters occupied 300-year-old karris for weeks on end in an attempt to prevent the wood-chipping of up to 85 per cent of the old-growth forest which borders the Beedelup National Forest. Despite interim listing of the area on the Register of the National Estate and scientific evidence that the forest harbours rare fauna, the Department of Conservation & Land Management has pressed ahead with plans to log the coupe. The Supreme Court recently upheld the right of the department to log the forest regardless of the conditions of the *Wildlife Act* and the implications for threatened species.

Barbara Booth

OVERSEAS

Rumble in the jungle

The image of Australia's BHP—tarnished by the acrimonious dispute over the environmental effects of the Ok Tedi copper mine in the Papua New Guinea Highlands—will be tested again should the company decide to develop a rich gold prospect 300 kilometres to the east. The mineral deposit is at the edge of the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area, 270 000 hectares of rainforest which encompasses the pristine catchments of several major rivers. The reserve is one of two places where the Research and Conservation Foundation of PNG and the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society have been working to integrate conservation with local development. Should BHP decide to go ahead with a new mine the landholders will not have a right of veto.

Stephen Garnett

A-pall-ing

The 'Fires of Asia' continued to burn largely unabated as *Wild* went to press, with some environmental and climate experts predicting that little relief could be expected before the end of the year. Smoke from the fires—on the islands of Borneo, Sumatra and throughout the



Wild correspondent Stephen Garnett and friends near Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area, Papua New Guinea—an area that may be threatened by a new gold-mine. Garnett collection

Indonesian archipelago—has blanketed much of South-east Asia for many months and more than a million hectares of some of the world's most important forest ecosystems have been destroyed. The fires are considered largely to be the result of land clearing for forestry and broad-scale commercial agriculture. There were reports of new fires being lit as late as early November.

Fears are held that a million hectares of Indonesian peatbogs—which may hold up to a fifth of the planet's carbon 'stored' in this form—may burn during the next six months, releasing an enormous quantity of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and thus further exacerbate global warming. In 1982–83 half a million hectares of Indonesian peatbogs burnt, an event which coincided with a significant rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide.

While world attention was on Asia, thousands of fires were burning in the planet's other great tract of rainforest, the Amazon Basin in South America. The number of fires in 1997 was estimated to be 28 per cent higher than in 1996—higher even than in the late 1980s when the level of land clearing by fire was considered to have reached alarming proportions. ☀

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



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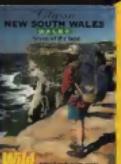
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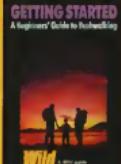
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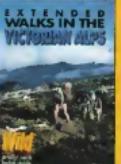
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Cry freedom

Reflections on being set loose, by Quentin Chester

by the second morning of our family holiday things were not looking good.

'I hate it here, I want to go home,' blubbered my elder daughter. 'Why can't we go back to our *real* home?'

I took a long, deep breath and looked out across the bay. Three pelicans were swooping low across the water. From our camp the shore line curved into a wide arc of sand. A breeze rustled through the mallee. It was late autumn but the sun was still strong.

Here we were—six adults and four young girls—at the start of seven days in Venus Bay Conservation Park on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula. We had a sailing dinghy, sea kayaks, an intemperate quantity of wine and 1500 glorious hectares of coastal bush all to ourselves. And suddenly one of our number had turned recalcitrant.

At that moment I knew there wasn't much point in trying to be persuasive. Past experience with kids of all ages had taught me that we had reached a variation of the 'What am I doing here?' impasse.

It is a question I've heard exclaimed on steep ridges and splutter from the lips of rain-doused bush cooks. There have been many occasions when I, too, have grumbled the same question—with a few expletives thrown in for good measure. It might be the weather, a fractious companion or the realisation that one's girth has become not so much a spare tyre as a complete Good-year showroom.

Whatever the catalyst, it is a question to which no one really expects an answer—at least not at the time it is asked. In this instance I suspect my eight-year-old's crisis was prompted by the sudden strangeness of her surroundings and by the mercurial nature of freedom.

Our two girls have had their share of days in the wilds and nights under canvas. Still, it had been a while since we had been in the bush. After a day trapped in the car and the excitement of a new place and new friends, my eldest was beset by one of those small emotional emergencies which are the stuff of childhood—and of parenting.

Freedom is so often invoked as a gift or a given that it is easy to overlook the lessons to be learnt. Parents long accustomed to the outdoors can perhaps be forgiven for assuming that their offspring will follow suit. After all, what could be more natural than wide horizons and pelicans on the wing?



Pelican. *Tad Janocinski*

The truth is that wild settings can be confronting even in their more benign guises compared with the familiar confines of cities and suburbs. It is perhaps a

measure of life at the close of this frantic, cosseted century that many of us—young and old—find an abrupt abundance of space and fresh air not so much invigorating as downright alien.

Like most parents my wife and I have spent a lot of time trying to shelter our

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kids from various dangers, both real and imagined. Don't talk to strangers, we say. Stay close. Keep off the road. Be careful. Don't wander away. No, you can't go to the park by yourself.

Protective elders are nothing new. Yet when I look back on my own upbringing I can't help feeling that the last few decades have seen a marked loss of innocence and freedom. Taking our girls into the sticks is one way my wife and I try to convey a little of the footloose, scabby-kneed life we both enjoyed as kids roaming the Adelaide Hills.

None the less, given their fitful encounters with the outdoors it is probably not surprising that our girls are flummoxed when the rules are reversed. At Venus Bay they were suddenly let off the leash. Why don't you see what you can find? we told them. Explore the beach. Go on, off you go. Yes, on your own. Go on, get lost!

Faced with the I-want-to-go-home crisis we resorted to a proven remedy—food. As a further gambit, a change of scene was decided on. So the afternoon was spent at an ocean beach at the southern end of the park; a sweep of caramel-coloured sand backed by a wall of dunes and framed by high headlands of limestone. Armed with fishing-rods, the grown-ups spread out along the beach. And while the kids tumbled and whooped up and down the dunes, lines were cast over the breaking waves.

Although we only managed to hook enough for a modest entree, the afternoon felt like a breakthrough. Every time a fish was landed the girls sprinted across the beach to be part of the moment before returning to the kinds of prattling, prancing games in which five–seven year old females seem to rejoice.

The kids were still romping in the sand when the sun dropped behind the cliffs and the air turned sharp. Then, as we were leaving, my beady-eyed youngest picked out a sea urchin's egg from the heap of weed and shells at the high-water mark. With vivid, vertical stripes of tan, red and chocolate-brown and a Braille-like surface of creamy stippling it was as magical and delicate a thing as you could imagine.

By dinner time the anxieties of the morning had dispersed into memory and for the rest of the week our first-born was her normal, effervescent self. At every opportunity the kids were off rummaging along the shore looking for crabs and treasures or disappearing into the shrubbery near camp to act out imaginary scenarios accompanied by a running chorus of shrieks and whispers.

That's the thing about freedom: once you get a taste for the authentic article you want it to last for ever. Still, it doesn't necessarily come easily. Making the transition from the regimens of work and home to the pared-back reality of being in the bush usually means having to grind a few emotional gears.

Such teething problems are not confined to the young. It can take hours—sometimes days—to disengage from familiar troubles

and comforts. Generally there's at least one person in the party who will be on edge at the start of a trip. Others can't wait to get going. They can be seen striding off, often in the wrong direction, with untied bootlaces, their pack listing at an alarming angle and a daff, fugitive gleam in their eyes. At least, that's probably how others see me.

There is, however, more to emancipation than finding graceful ways to take your leave. It also means exploring the possibilities of the place into which you've decided to wander. Some effort may be required. Not necessarily lung-bursting exertion, but a willingness to venture with one's eyes and mind open. In other words, you can't find things—be they inspiring sights, moments of liberation or miraculous exoskeletons of echinoderms—if you don't go looking.

In this department our younger daughter has a particular way of seeing and a knack for the difficult question. One afternoon she spied a group of pelicans wheeling on the warm air several hundred metres above our camp. For five minutes I was interrogated about why such birds should be up so high. My explanations appeared less than convincing. 'Maybe they're up there...because they can be', I said lamely. My inquisitor turned silently skywards and gave a cryptic little smile.

Our third morning at Venus Bay dawned clear and calm. Two dads and two daughters took to the kayaks. My five-year-old was just the right size to sit comfortably in the aft hatch, from where she regally studied the passing submarine parade. The surface of the water was glassy-smooth and we stared through the limpid shallows to the grasses and darting fish below.

Then, halfway across the bay, a pair of fins sliced up through the surface only a few metres to our starboard. Soon there was a whole family of dolphins—six or maybe more—cavorting around us. A mother and calf swam close to our boats, rocketing through the water and peering up at us with their playful grins and bright eyes.

As the dolphins disappeared ahead I started to paddle madly in pursuit. 'Why were they following us, Dad?' asked my younger daughter. In the heat of the moment I wasn't sure what to say. I mumbled that they were probably feeding and they had come to check us out. 'And perhaps,' I suggested, 'they're just having a good time.' 'You mean, like the pelicans', chirped my companion.

And so, for the remainder of the week, we continued to explore Venus Bay, stare into camp-fires and think of the fish we should have caught. We strolled the beaches, hustling crabs into buckets and listening to oyster catchers tooting nearby. When the sea breezes arrived we sailed to the tiny islands in the bay where we saw skates skimming across barely submerged rock platforms and pelicans nesting among the box thorns.

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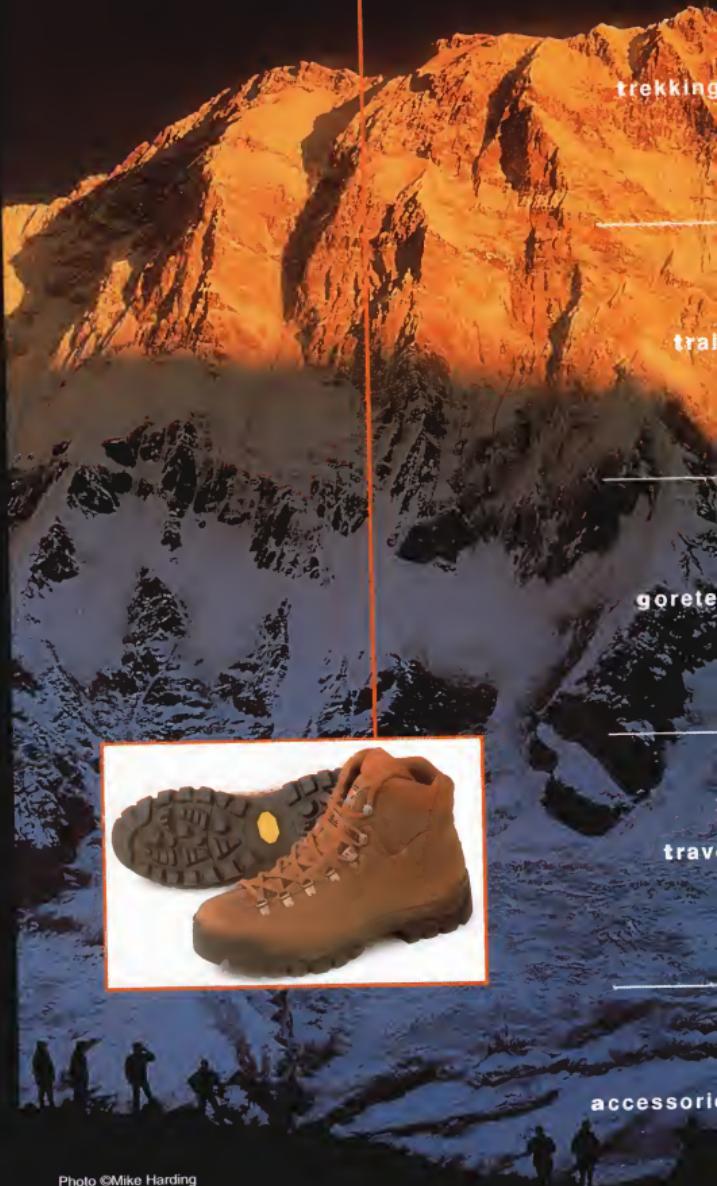


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Paul Westwood looking good on Ingleton's Mill (2a) at Price's Cave, Warrington. Photo Michael Myers

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As always, we parents did our fumbling best to explain things. But our efforts to inform were almost invariably ignored and our urchins were happiest making their very own discoveries, be they 'wicked' hide-outs or something really 'disgusting' that had been washed up on the beach.

Still, at least there were a few shared moments. Some evenings we would wander into the scrub looking for wildlife. The mallee woodland of the Venus Bay Peninsula is a plentiful habitat for birds and small mammals. As well as hoping to see a Dunnart or a pygmy possum there was just a chance that we might spot a larger animal which has been missing in action on the mainland for the better part of a century.

Venus Bay is no ordinary conservation park. A high fence has been erected on one of the narrowest stretches of the peninsula. Behind this barrier has been a determined campaign to eradicate foxes and feral cats to make way for the reintroduction of brush-tailed bettongs.

During our nocturnal forays we saw many things—mobs of kangaroos, hopping mice, Dunnarts and any number of spiders—but, as it happened, no bettongs. There were, however, plenty of bettong tracks, scats and diggings. Though disappointed the kids were for once eager to learn about these tell-tale signs, the feral predators and the peninsula's tall fence.

Had I thought that I would make any sense I might have tried to explain that parents, too, often build fences so their offspring can flourish within. Then there was the paradoxical thought that people are only truly free when they recognise their limits, and kids of all ages like to push the boundaries, to play harder; to swim faster; to fly higher.

Had it not been the end of our holiday I could also have mentioned my hunch that freedom is in the doing and that, although the memory of these moments might endure, you have to keep renewing the experience whether that be on top of a lonely mountain, looking into the eyes of a dolphin or sharing a child's crooked smile.

I guess I would have tried to put these half-baked notions into words if we had not all been so weary from packing up to go. I might even have suggested that freedom can be as wondrous and as fragile as an urchin's egg. But as our station-wagon bounced along the track out of the park I noticed that my five-year-old was already asleep. So instead I asked her sister what she wanted to do in the next holidays. 'Dad,' she said, looking back across the water, 'I reckon we should spend two weeks at Venus Bay.'

Quentin Chester

Quentin Chester (see Contributors in Wild no 3) writes regularly about going bush. He is the co-author of *The Outdoors Companion*, *The Kimberley—Horizons of Stone* and, most recently, *Australo's Wild Islands*, which explores the diversity of 28 Australian islands from the tropics to the sub-Antarctic.

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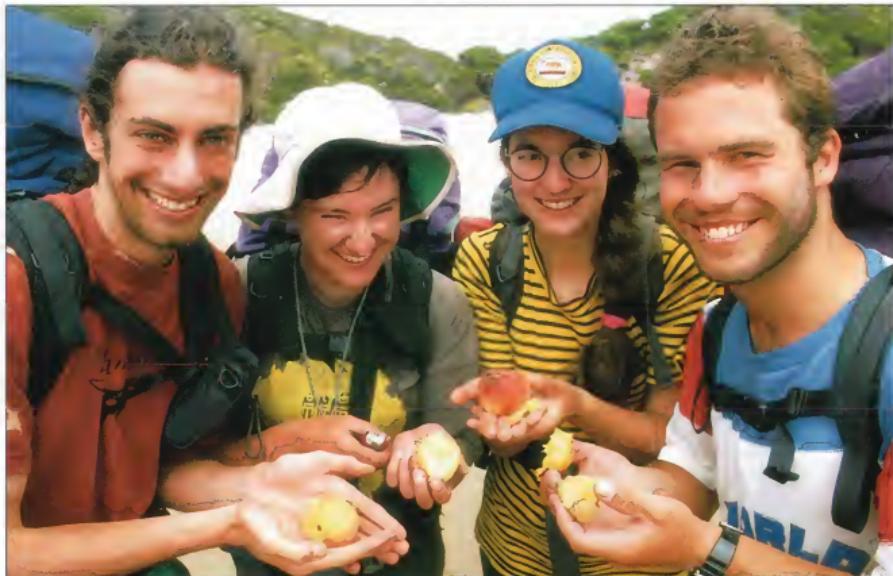
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Looking up a storm

Basic food tips for the bush, by Morven Grant



You are going to take the plunge and go on an overnight bushwalk. As the necessary gear piles higher, it dawns on you that you will soon be treating your body like a packhorse! You will certainly need the right food to fuel it for the challenge. However, since you have to carry your food, you will have to balance its weight and the space it takes up with your nutritional requirements. Nutrition and diet are important for your performance and enjoyment of outdoors pursuits and careful consideration of what food to take should be a priority when planning your trip. So don't just open the fridge door and grab anything!

MENU PLANNING

The first step in planning a menu for the outdoors is to think logically and simply—

an elegant, cordon-bleu meal is not what you need. Nor is it necessary to buy expensive (and often drab) freeze-dried meals for an overnight walk. If you are only going to be out for a couple of days you don't need to skimp and can afford to take relatively fresh, enjoyable food. It is best not to deviate too far from your normal meals but simply to increase their bulk.

The more preparation you do at home, the easier and quicker cooking your meals will be at night in the bush. For example, freeze a nice piece of marinated steak ready for your first night's meal and fry it with precooked potatoes.

The main considerations when planning menus are climate, terrain, distances covered and the number of people with whom you will be travelling. Space limitations have to be considered when packing

A windfall? Displaying peaches found on a South-west Tasmanian beach. Stephen Curtin

your gear into a kayak or your bushwalking pack.

Just as at home, the food you take into the bush can be divided into breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. If you start your walk in the morning, omit that day's breakfast as you can have it beforehand and if you finish in the afternoon your last day's dinner may be left with your transportation to eat on your return. It's a good idea to always carry an emergency meal—not just in case you get lost; you could easily burn a meal or tip over a pan and spill its contents.

Walking all day with a pack requires a lot of energy. As well as your main meals it is important to have easily accessible

nibbles to keep your blood sugar level up so that fatigue doesn't set in and your energy levels decline. Even super athletes will rapidly become exhausted when walking uphill all day if they don't continuously fuel their bodies. Rapid declines in energy are more common in males than in females due to the formers' often higher metabolism and lower body fat percentage.

If you intend to depart early the morning after you camp make sure that your breakfast is easy to prepare and to clean up after. Cereal portions could be premixed with powdered

milk in a container so only water is needed.

However, if you have time in the morning you would do better to relax over premixed pancakes and stewed fruit which has been left overnight to soak—perhaps with spices.

Fluids are extremely important on your walk regardless of the season. In summer mix water with such electrolyte/carbohydrate drinks as Gatorade, Raro or Vita-fresh to keep you hydrated and add some quickly absorbed fuel to the body. Make sure that you drink as much as possible and don't skimp on the quantity of water you carry since plenty of fluids will reduce cramps, headaches and fatigue throughout the day. In winter make sure that you have enough fuel to heat water for comforting hot drinks to boost your metabolism (and morale!) so that the body generates some heat just before you hop into your sleeping-bag. Various hot drinks, hot chocolate, Sustagen, lemon- and fruit teas are important, especially the non-caffeinated ones as they will hydrate the body instead of dehydrating it.

ENERGY REQUIREMENTS

The human body acquires energy from the breakdown of the food we eat to stay alive. The sum of this energy is considered our general daily requirement or Basal Metabolic Rate. Average daily intake of energy for a 70 kilogram male is about 12 600 kilojoules but this will not meet your needs on a rigorous walk up a hill. If the work you will do on your bushwalk is physically hard you will have to increase the amount of energy you extract from your food each day. The harder you

walk the more 'energy-dense' foods you should consume. These include cheese, nuts, and creamy pasta meals. When planning a menu it is important to consider that your energy needs will vary due to pack loads, terrain, climate and your gender, age and weight. In cold weather your physical demands for energy will increase as you will have to 'burn' extra food just to keep an even body temperature. Meals should consist of food that will be enjoyed by everyone in the group and satisfy each person's energy needs since fatigue

can lead to apathy, a poor appetite and low morale.

At least 60 per cent of your energy from food should come from carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates such as rice, pasta, potatoes and bread provide the best form of energy for the sustained activity of bushwalking. (Fortunately they are easily carried in a rucksack!) Up to 30 per cent of your energy may come from fats, and 10–15 per cent from proteins.

PREPARATION

Once you have bought the food for your walk and scavenged the rest from your

Mexican burritos

- mountain bread
- lean mince or beans
- onion
- taco spice mix
- lettuce
- tomato
- grated cheese



TYPICAL MENU FOR A WEEKEND WALK

Dinner Friday

Hamburger from road-house
Choc Wedge

Breakfast Saturday

Stewed, dried apples and sultanas (soak the night before, then sauté in cinnamon and butter).

Rolled oats
Honey

Lunch Saturday

Pitta bread/crackers
Mushrooms
Cheese
Salami
Hummus
Muesli bars
Fresh fruit

Snacks along the track

Sesame-seed snaps
Fruit-and-nut chocolate
Scroggin
Yogurt-coated muesli bars

Dinner Saturday

Entrée: dip and crackers
Main: rice or pasta and sauce

Tuna

Cream sauce (made with powdered milk)
Broccoli
Cheese

Dessert: fruit cake
Powdered chocolate mousse
Rice pudding (cook leftover rice from main into mush, then add sugar, powdered milk and sultanas).

Breakfast Sunday

Muesli with powdered milk
Omelette with last night's leftovers

Lunch Sunday

Same as Saturday
Sun-dried tomatoes
Artichokes

Dinner Sunday

Chips from road-house
Cherry Ripe

kitchen cupboards lay everything out on the kitchen bench. Cut meat and vegetables into portions. Wrap meat in foil, and freeze. If you are taking dehydrated, pre packaged meals you can reduce their bulk by making a small hole in the package and squeezing out the air. (just make sure that these foods aren't exposed to moisture when packed away.) Remove all cardboard packaging from the food and place it in resealable, plastic bags (with instructions or labels if necessary). Film canisters are excellent for carrying small quantities of foodstuffs such as cooking oil, salt, soya sauce and spices. Tupperware sandwich boxes make great storage containers for vegetables and will help to prevent them being damaged in your pack. Green long-life vegetable bags help to keep vegetables fresh by decreasing the ripening rate and preserving vitamins. Don't use tins since they are heavy and you will need to carry them out with your rubbish. Also avoid carrying food that requires refrigeration, except perhaps for the first night of your snow walk. Use powdered milk and powdered egg substitute.

Careful packing of your rucksack is essential. If food items required for lunch or snacks can't be carried in your pocket they should be placed near the top of your pack for easy access. Package small, delicate items in your billy.

GNOCCHI AND PESTO

- fresh gnocchi (available in vacuum-sealed packets)
- roasted capsicum pesto
- prechopped fresh vegetables
- parmesan cheese

Gnocchi are cooked when they float to the top of boiling water

Solid items that aren't crushed easily can be packed towards the base of your pack—just be careful when dropping your pack heavily to the ground.

Remember to take a bag for the rubbish. It is vital that you carry out all your rubbish—don't litter our bushland!

DRINKS

Drinks should make up about 10 per cent of your energy intake. During prolonged

activity feeding the body with liquid carbohydrates will help to maintain blood-glucose levels so that fatigue doesn't set in to limit your physical capabilities. One of the best ways to absorb nutrients quickly is through liquid carbohydrates such as Sustagen, Gatorade or Powerade. These

BREAKFAST

Breakfast is an important meal so make it interesting and appetising. It should make up at least 20 per cent of your daily energy intake. Cereal (prepare a mixture with lots of nuts and dried fruit) is handy



can all be digested and the energy reach the bloodstream within an hour.

Dehydration will significantly affect your physical ability. Thirst is not a good indicator of fluid need. Try to drink every 15 minutes while walking whether you are thirsty or not. It is better to drink a little frequently so that the body absorbs it readily than to drink a lot and have it sit in your body in a large mass. Cold, diluted drinks are readily absorbed on hot days.

One satisfied customer, Mt Tate, Snowy Mountains, New South Wales. Simon Carter, Right, Wild's Stephen Curtain enjoys his tucker. *Curtain collection*

Jo's falafels

- falafel mix (add water and shallow fry)
- hummus mix
- salad mix
- wild-rice mix
- pitta bread

if you need to get away quickly from your camp with a minimum of fuss.

Dried fruit is excellent and can be poached and hydrated with spices for a tasty breakfast. Dried fruit is lightweight, won't spoil and is a great source of

carbohydrates. Mix the poached fruit with rolled oats to give a good carbohydrate base to your hot breakfast when overnight ski-touring. (Add hot chocolate for something different.) Or, for a delicious start, mix stewed apples with pancake batter and fry. Make sure that

DINNER

Dinner should supply 20–30 per cent of your energy intake. Here you can be especially lavish with a three-course meal (although beware of being too ambitious). Dried hummus mixed with a little water makes a great nibble with pitta bread while you are cooking the main meal. Pasta and rice are the best bases for meals in the outdoors. (They need water to be cooked, so plan to camp close to where water is available. Alter-

fry. Just add some chilli, ginger, shoyu, garlic flakes and vegetables—better than yumcha at the Red Dragon!

SNACKS

Snacks should make up the remaining percentage of your energy needs and are important for maintaining an even blood-sugar level. They should always be within easy reach—kept deep within your pack they will be useless to your body. Scroggin is a favourite with everyone because it has delicious ingredients. Mixtures are often based on raw nuts and dried fruit, with chocolate added. You can add anything you like to the base mix that is predominantly carbohydrate and fat—a great, continuous energy source. Muesli bars carry well and are good and filling with a huge range of flavours. Dried-fruit leather is sweet and a good source of carbohydrates, as are Bell's fruit bars.

For more advice on bush catering, see Monica Chapman's article 'Dry Your Own Food' in *Wild* no 66 and Karen Tempest's guidebook 'Cooking for the Bush', free with *Wild* no 58.

FRESH NOODLE STIR FRY

- fresh Hokkien noodles
 - shoyu, ginger, garlic
 - prechopped fresh vegetables
 - sliced beef (frozen or dehydrated)
 - sesame oil
- Toss together in hot pan and fry quickly



you drink a lot with breakfast to recover from the night's dehydration.

LUNCH

Lunch should supply at least another 20 per cent of your daily energy intake. It must be simple to prepare. Crackers, pitta bread, lunch meats (ham, corned beef and the like), cheese, nut spreads, fruit, muesli bars and sweets make light and easy food for lunch. A hot soup or noodle can be satisfying (although bear in mind the extra stove fuel you will need). Make sure such items are stowed near the top of your pack for easy access.

natively, you can precook pasta and carry it in a resealable, plastic bag.) Add one of the delicious array of pesto flavours you can find in the supermarket and you will eat better than you would at home! Varieties of three-minute, quick-cook rice are available and many manufacturers produce extensive ranges of dehydrated rice, potato, couscous and pasta meals. These are simple to prepare and light to carry. Enhance their taste with some spices, salami or fresh vegetables. Chinese noodles are cheap, light and quick to stir

Overall, however, the best advice for someone catering for overnight walking for the first time is to have fun and not get too stressed about it! Wait until you go on a ten-day Tasmanian wilderness walk—now that's a culinary challenge! ☺

Morven Grant enjoys everything to do with the mountains—climbing, Telemarking, bushwalking and mountain biking. She recently finished an applied-science degree at Melbourne University and at present works at Bogong Equipment. She has lived in the USA, Canada and the UK but considers Australia to be the 'best place in the world to live.'



An *Ennobling* Experience

*David Baird tastes Blue Mountains
wilderness...and almost chokes!*



wild bushwalking



Screech, bang! Oh dear. Yet another indignity to worsen my fragile state of mind. After another late night at the office, driving a little too eagerly to get home I somehow managed to shunt an innocent Datsun 120Y round a corner of a not so busy suburban street. My fault, of course. Negligent driving and it incurred a hefty fine. Why does it always happen to me? My boss doesn't seem to appreciate my skills; my children contract mysterious illnesses which, after many sleepless nights, are diagnosed by a leading paediatrician as constipation; my left knee refuses to assist my desire to get fit at the gymnasium—and now I landed my car and somebody else's in a smash-repair shop. It simply wasn't fair.

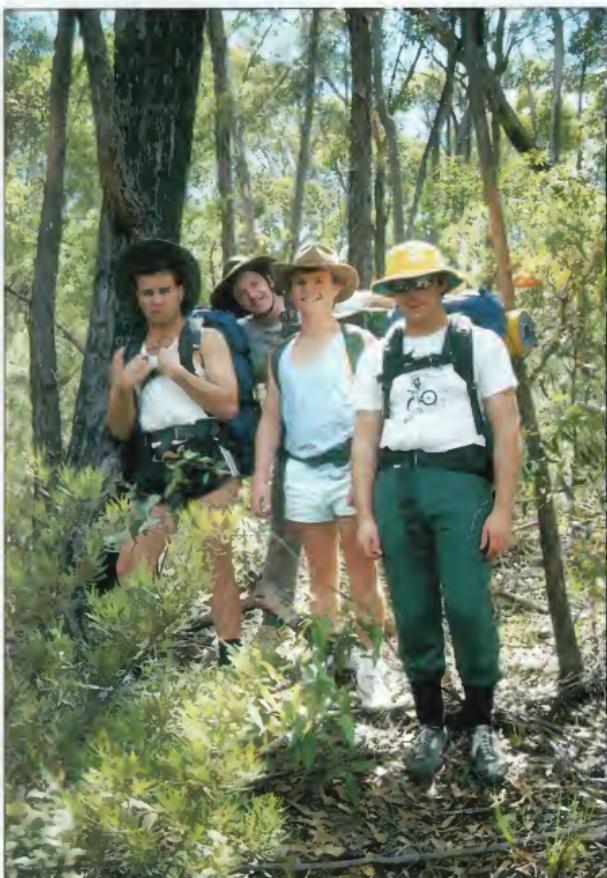
As usual my dear wife had the solution. 'Take a hike.' You mean *bushwalk*.' I don't care what you call it. You need a break and you should go bush. And not on one of those wimpy little walks with signs and tracks. A real walk with genuine wilderness and longer than one night out.' (Obviously she has been reading *Wild* Editorials. Perhaps she would be happy to have a break from me?)

What could I do but agree? So a plan was hatched and a bushwalk of the wilderness kind was selected. I dug up an ancient copy of *Wild* with notes on walks in the vicinity of the Colo River in the Blue Mountains and after a quick scan of the maps it was decided that Dave Noble's two-day, medium-grade Wollangambe River trip was perfect as it could be expanded to three easy days by including a bit of sightseeing up the Colo Gorge. Nothing to it. This was going to be a great wilderness adventure. A real bushwalk, treading where few people have trod before—well, not we anyway.

The team and time off from work were hastily organised. My ubiquitous partner Rod was raring to go. His brother Simon, a

veteran of the Six Foot Track and Bungonia Gorge, was champing at the bit, and the superfit though less experienced Ben volunteered his membership to the team and his four-wheel-drive truck. (His application was fast-tracked and approved by the EEC—Expedition Executive Committee.) All we had to do now was to take

careered down the fire track and arrived at Bowen Hill to get on with the business part of what would be our epic journey. Through the bush we plunged, rucksacks full of essentials, bodies rippling with energy (well, let's just say that Rod's body was rippling) and after a few deft manoeuvres down a short cliff-face we reached



'The boys.' The author is second from the left. (No wonder their wives were glad to see the back of them!) Right, a rather limp effort—the first night's camp. Pages 42 and 43, the boys hit their stride on the Wollangambe River. All photos David Baird

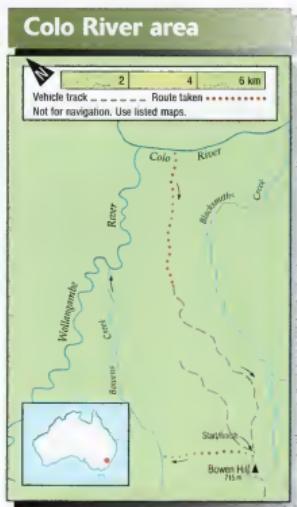
this pleasurable innocuous ramble through the wilderness.

On Thursday morning Ben arrived complete with truck and the two other members of the team. Into the back leaped Simon, I, the genitalic of the group, into the front and away we went. A great start. We

our first objective, Bowens Creek, smiling and feeling pleased with ourselves.

You know, that Dave Noble character is an astute judge of a walk.' Agreement all round.

'Right! Let's pin our ears back and make the Wollangambe River for lunch.' However, it turned out that walking along creekbeds devoid of a track isn't as easy as the topographical maps would seem to indicate. They do not, for example, portray fallen logs, insect plagues, boulders, rotting timber and enormous spider webs with indignant arachnids in their centre. 'Don't worry,' I tell the lads, 'the Wollangambe is a



real river with water to swim in and clear banks to walk along'.

We arrived at the Wollangambe just after lunch and sure enough we were greeted by an abundance of beautiful, icy cold, clean water. So this was wilderness. No kiosks, no ghetto-blasters, no signs, no smoking, no pit toilets, no clear walking paths. The tranquillity and the scenery were magnificent. Precipitous cliffs flanked bubbling rapids which were regularly interrupted by idyllic little waterfalls cascading into mirror-smooth ponds ideal for drinking and swimming (in that order).

ped its entrance. Anyway, we were probably only a kilometre away from the Colo River.

On day two the Colo beckoned. According to the map it was wide, straight and obviously easier to walk beside than the tortuous terrain through which we'd been stumbling. You know, I'm convinced that we never did find the Colo River. The river we struggled along remained narrow, twisting and incredibly difficult for walking. Frankly, I don't believe the Colo River exists. It's some cartographer's cruel trick. We spent a day and a half hunting for that

amount of water and collapsed in fatigue-induced sleep. That night I dreamed of the temptations that threatened to seduce the wilderness walker—the chair lifts at Thredbo, the kiosk at Garie Beach and coin-operated gas barbecues.

We continued our climb of the unknown ridge on the third day. It was so hard. We arrived at the top. No fire track. Despair all round. How would we get out? Rod had never been in a helicopter before and was wondering what it would be like. But Ben, with the eyes of an eagle and the nose of a sniffer dog, came to our rescue. On a ridge

about half a kilometre away he spotted the white roof of a four-wheel-drive vehicle. So after more bush bashing, more cursing about the ferocious scrub, many glucose tablets and a descent followed by yet another spiky-bushed climb we eventually arrived at the correct fire track, walked out to Ben's truck and began the drive home.

Even that was not without incident. We were hit by a dramatic hailstorm that soaked everything in the back of the truck including Simon. Later, during a stop for meat pies and soft drinks, we were the focus of a gawking gaggle of Indian tourists who insisted on photographing us. One would think that they had never seen four totally whacked bushwalkers before. Maybe they assumed that we represented the quintessential Australian bushman.

Despite our ill feelings towards the Central Mapping Authority and Dave Noble (no problem was ever *our* fault) we had endured an epic that would be envied by many a latter-day, high-tech bushwalker. The scenery had been spectacular, the walking unaccommodating, the uncertainty of Alfred Hitchcock proportions. As Rod so aptly put it: 'Next time you ring me up for another one of your adventures, make sure it's got a track.'

PS Upon returning from the aforementioned bushwalk I reread the relevant issue of *Wild*. Perhaps, just perhaps, we had been a little unkinked in what we said about Dave Noble. 

The best maps to use when walking in the area covered by this walk are the Mountain Lagoon and Colo Heights 1:25 000 Central Mapping Authority sheets. Note that the fire track taken to Bowen Hill by the author's party passes through private property—permission to enter is required.

David Baird makes a habit of turning seemingly innocuous bushwalks into tales of bizarre self-flagellation. He has developed a sworn aversion to the Colo River and its environs and at present prefers bushwalks which are flat, short and follow clearly defined tracks.



But the walking was heartbreakingly real Ludwig Leichhardt, pioneering stuff only fit for masochists. Every step required care and concentration. The scrub was dense (not so the bushwalkers) so we'd rock hop down the middle of the river. When that avenue closed it was back into the jungle.

'Let's have a swim.'

'Good idea—maybe we should stop here for a breather.'

'How far to the Colo River?'

'According to the map it's round the next bend.'

'Where are we going to camp?'

'At the Wollangambe-Colo junction.'

'Are we there yet?'

'Don't worry, we are right on schedule.'

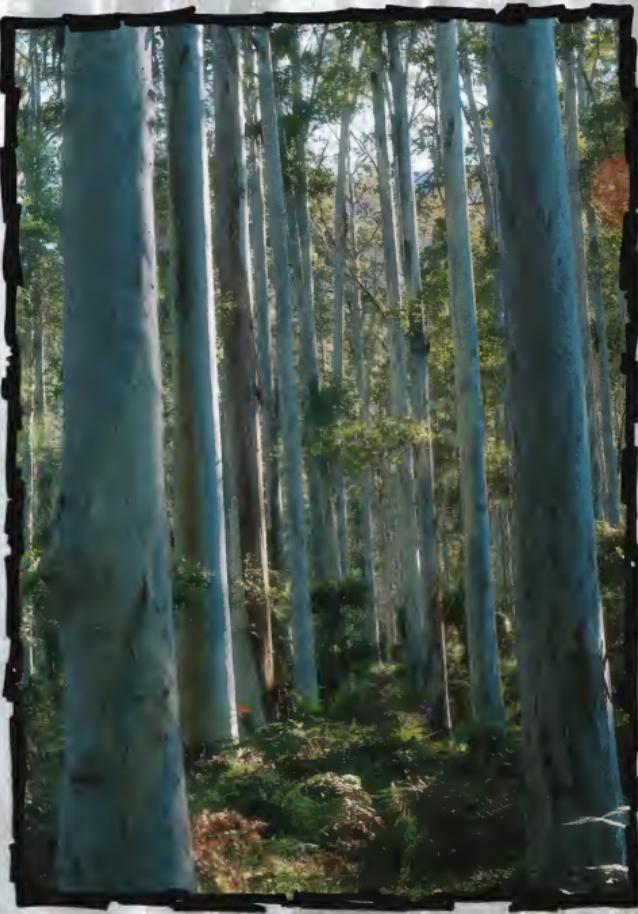
'I want an ice-cream.'

'Shut up.'

We didn't quite make the Wollangambe-Colo junction on the first night. Instead we had to set up camp on a tenuous, sandy patch so unstable that an unladen tunnel tent would tip up when somebody unzip-

wretched strip of water. Perhaps the Water Board had surreptitiously dammed it up hoping that the greenies' wouldn't find out. Who knows? Maybe Dave Noble? I don't think so. Be warned! When Dave Noble says 'medium grade' he means 'very hard to excruciating'. When he says 'hard grade' that means take a chain-saw (preferably an environmentally sound, green one). When he says 'two days' he means 'two full moons' not two diurnal revolutions of planet earth.

Towards the end of the second day a decision was made; forget the river and go for the top of the ridge. This presented a whole new set of challenges; sharp, uphill scrambling, no water-supply, mosquito breeding grounds, thick bands of prickly, man-eating scrub—and we didn't have a clue where we were going. As the sky began to darken we fortunately found a small but comfortable camp-site, erected our tents, rationed out a stick of salami for dinner, washed it down with a small



Blue Gum Forest

Hallowed ground in the spiritual heartland of
Australian bushwalking, by Colin Gibson

below the mighty, clifflined flanks of the Grose valley gorges, where the two major headwaters of the Grose River meet, nestles the Blue Gum Forest—hallowed ground in the spiritual heartland of Australian bushwalking. Where Govetts Creek and the Grose River meet, alluvial flats have developed; of no great area, they are a significant feature in a valley with only a modicum of level land. That there was a tall forest of Deane's bluegum on the alluvial floor had been known to mountain residents and to adventurous, city-based sightseers but at the time of the commercialised bushwalking boom of the early 1930s the Blue Gum Forest was still a well-kept secret, a state of affairs that could have led to the demise of the forest.

Years before surveyors and engineers had examined the length of the Grose valley and studied its potential for various schemes: proposals for water-supply, a rail link and mining had all been on the drawing board.



Agricultural pursuits were never considered seriously for there was simply nothing on offer in the rugged valley. However, at the junction of the two major watercourses the deep alluvial soil and tall timber had been noted, and grazing leases applied for.

No doubt a few had racked their brains to think of a way to withdraw the timber resource from the depths of the valley; trees as tall and as full as their species can grow, some hundreds of years old. But the difficulty of access ensured that there was no hope of profiting from extraction of the timber and for many years there were no threats to the sanctity of the forest.

One of the first parties from the Sydney Bush Walkers to visit the Blue Gum entered the valley from the Mt Victoria side in April (Easter) 1931, arriving at the forest at a propitious time. The party was led by one of the most accomplished bushwalkers of the day, Alan Pierpoint Rigby, who had joined the Mountain Trails Club in 1923 and been at the forefront of the formation of the Sydney Bush Walkers four years later.

He was a commercial artist, enthusiastic and possessed of a volatile wit; like many forward-thinking men and women of the time Rigby was an admirer of nature and the natural, his analytical mind not bound by convention. Myles Dunphy, a founder of the Mountain Trails Club, compared Rigby's poetic sensibilities to those of his great friend, the artist Roy Davies, and commended Rigby for his ability to communicate and his gift for description and observation. These were the kinds of attributes that Dunphy valued and which contrasted so much with the materialism of the day.

Having arrived at Blue Gum Forest the walkers were struck with the beauty of the place, a graceful and majestic scene in such contrast to the unrelenting rug-

Trails Club meeting on 17 April 1931. Soon the ball was rolling. Various enquiries were made and in June Dunphy wrote to Hungerford expressing the concern of the bushwalkers.

At a meeting in July, the Sydney Bush Walkers took stock of the situation. There were doubts whether it would be possible to save the forest. Such was the quandary when Joe Turner proposed that a committee



Above, Myles Dunphy, left, and Alan Rigby, two bushwalkers who were very active in early environmental battles in New South Wales. Roger Rigby collection. Near left, bushwalkers including Rigby, standing, lunched in Blue Gum Forest day, November 1931; bushwalkers including Rigby, standing, lunched in Blue Gum Forest far right. Andy Macqueen collection. Far left, Blue Gum Forest today. Lucas Trihey

be formed to investigate means for acquiring the forest, and thus in July 1931 the Blue Gum Forest Committee came into existence. This may have been the first instance when such an 'action' group was formed by the fledgling conservation movement. The initial committee comprised Rigby, Dunphy, Harold Chardon, Walter Roots, Joe Turner, Harold Buckland and Harold Perrott. In due course Roy Bennett, Noel Griffiths and Dorothy Lawry were also elected.

Hungerford's response was to the point. For £150 he would stay his hand and transfer the lease to the bushwalkers. The bushwalking movement was then in its infancy; the MTC had a membership of 27 and about 140 people belonged to the SBW. The Depression was biting hard on all concerned (including Hungerford). The sum asked was considered exorbitant. Hungerford wrote to say that he was making a considerable sacrifice. He may have thought that to sell would save him much labour, and he was undoubtedly impressed by the bushwalkers' level of interest. Bargaining from strength, he intended to make a profitable deal. He wanted a £50 deposit by the end of November. The bushwalkers

knew they had little chance of raising this sum.

Dunphy contacted Hungerford and a meeting on site was arranged for 15 November 1931. On the way to the forest Dunphy decided to look for Dockers Ladder, said to be in the vicinity of Perrys Lookdown. The Dockers Ladder route had been pioneered by Ernest Docker, a photographer and a great admirer of the Grose valley scenery, during his participation in the expedition led by Ecclestone Du Faur in 1875. Du Faur had shown Dockers Ladder on his 1878 map. Joe Turner, Albert Barnard and Maurie Berry were there. At the Lookdown they split up and spent some time searching and probing around the cliffs. Turner yelled out: they had found the rotting remains of the old rope ladder. The men jumped the slight drop which was 'pie for wallabies'. The steep buttress was then followed into the valley; to Dunphy 'the descent was a remarkable adventure, almost unbelievable, the situation

The parties converged on the forest and convened the meeting on Hungerford's lease under Mt Banks (then known as Mt King George). Dunphy regarded the lessee with some disdain believing that Hungerford had deliberately felled a tree along the river to emphasise his position to the committee. This may or may not have been the case. It is certain that Dunphy, like Rigby, was simply aghast at the whole prospect and depressed to think that methodical destruction of outstanding scenic areas was so much a matter of course, and that the

Lawry and Lockley retreated to the shelter of a hollow log and stood watching. The final terms were £25 deposit, the balance of £105 to be paid by the end of the year. The meeting dispersed.

No time was lost in the ensuing months. The hat went the rounds and donations were called for, social activities were organised for the benefit of Blue Gum and there was a Blue Gum Ball. Lockley publicised the cause in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a pamphlet was designed and widely distributed. Private enterprise made



“The Blue Gum Forest campaign had galvanised the bushwalkers into action and given them a public profile for the first time.”

spectacular, and the steepness of the route incredible. The descent took three-and-a-quarter hours and was considered very difficult; the route did not win Dunphy's endorsement as a recommended pass into the valley, yet today Dockers Buttress is probably the most frequently used access to the forest.

Another group had met Hungerford at the top of 'Pierces Pass' and was guided in. Hungerford had pegged a claim on the oil-shale outcrop along the base of the tall cliffs. Dunphy believed that this pass was the original access for horses and cattle into the valley. In this party were JC Lockley (the journalist 'Redgum' of the *Sydney Morning Herald*) and bushwalkers Dorothy Lawry, Harold Chardon and Win Lewis. Lockley was then a man of nearly 70 and not a hardened bushwalker; the walk was extremely beautiful and the party took its time. Meanwhile Alan Rigby, Harold Perrott, Roy Bennett and Noel Griffiths had walked in by way of Govetts Leap.

Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs of NSW President Michael Maack addressing bushwalkers in 1992 on the 60th anniversary of the preservation of Blue Gum Forest. The audience includes Dot Butler (on left in red jumper) and Alan Rigby's wife Enid (in dark suit fifth to the right of Butler). Macqueen. Near right, Blue Gum Forest c 1932. Far right, this photo of Blue Gum Forest by Alan Rigby was used extensively in the 1932 campaign to save the forest. Roger Rigby collection

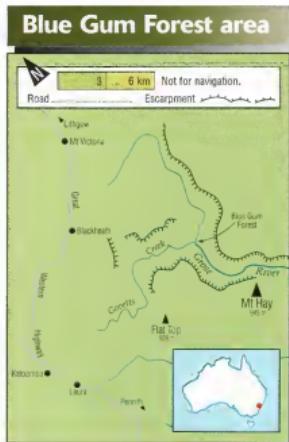
Lands Department itself was ignorant of the special qualities of the place and its suitability for any purpose other than a grazing lease.

A thunderstorm had been brewing all day and it was as though the gods themselves had decided to attend this critical meeting. The thunder pealed and an inch of rain fell in 20 minutes. The protagonists had gathered around a fire in their capes and wide-brimmed hats. Dorothy Lawry has recorded:

The members of the conference just donned their waterproof capes, squatted in a circle under the trees, and conferred. All round them rose the straight blue trunks of the gums which were inspiration, with here and there a recently planted young walnut if one knew where to look for it, and not even the deluge could dampen their ardour.

its contribution with Hartland and Hyde, John Sands and BJ Ball Ltd paying for the pamphlet.

During the year of the so-called 'hiking craze', 1932, there were many spectacular events. In one of these (said to have been attended by 8000 people) the actor Bert Bailey (who portrayed 'Dad' in the film *On*



Our Selection) addressed the throng at lunch-time and added an appeal for the Blue Gum Forest Fund.

The Wild Life Preservation Society, on the recommendation of Roy Bennett, donated £25, which became the deposit, and the MTC and SBW raised £18 between them. His eye on the prize, Hungerford wrote to the committee suggesting 'means of raising the money by broadcasting and through the press'. With a sense of urgency the committee looked into the possibility of raising a loan. One name quickly came to mind, that of a business executive who had also been Chief Commissioner for Railways and was an

towards their part of the forest and had no intention of felling any of the trees.

The bushwalkers handed title of the former Hungerford portion back to the Crown as a matter of course. The Blue Gum Forest Reserve for public recreation (40 acres) was proclaimed in the New South Wales *Government Gazette* on 2 September 1932. The original trustees were Bennett, Lawry, Turner and Rigby. Maurie Berry replaced Rigby in 1935, and in that year Jim Cleary was appointed a fifth trustee. In 1961 the land was absorbed into the newly created Blue Mountains National Park.

The Blue Gum Forest campaign had galvanised the bushwalkers into action and

a chorus of 'for he's a jolly good fellow' and an ensuing camp-fire concert. Bill Holesgrove, who was present, later wrote a pertinent comment: 'It would be a good thing if more of our public men had the same love of the simple life and could gain the wider vision which comes with life in the bush and find the sense of comradeship and mutual understanding which is inseparable from the camp-fire.'

Coast and Mountain Walker Jim Hyman remembered the beauty of the forest that night:

The act of going to bed always gives a normal person a feeling of intense satisfaction and nowhere more so than beside a campfire. And nowhere, in my opinion, more so than in the Blue Gum Forest. As you lie on your back, the campfire casts a flickering light on the ghostly trees, while high above, stars wink down at you through the canopy of leaves. This might easily be an enchanted forest like you read about in medieval fairy tales, as you gradually sink under its spell and sleep.



outdoors enthusiast—WJ Cleary. He agreed to provide an anonymous loan of £80, interest free, for two years and so by February 1932 Hungerford had been paid; fund-raising to cover the loans would continue for the next two years. Smaller contributions came from a variety of sources, among them the Melbourne Walking and Touring Club, the Australian Forest League and Edward Hordern.

Jim Cleary's contribution had saved the day. Hungerford now had full payment and the Department of Lands revoked the Conditional Purchase Lease, eventually reserving the block for public recreation. The campaign to save the Blue Gum had specifically been concerned with that part of the forest under Mt Banks. The forest on the side of the river under Perrys Lookdown was on a freehold portion owned by Edward Hordern of the wealthy Sydney business family. This allotment, originally granted to Benjamin Carver in September 1875, had been in the possession of the Hordern family since 1884. For a time Carver had a small house and stockyards on the flat. The Horderns later planted tungs and introduced grasses to improve the potential for pasture. To the bushwalkers' great relief they learned that the Hordern family, though somewhat bemused by all the fuss, had a more benign regard

given them a public profile for the first time. They had become more aware of what could happen and, indeed, what was happening to some of the country's scenic treasures. Efforts on other bushland campaigns increased with the newly formed Federation of Bushwalking Clubs of New South Wales and the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council spearheading the work. There is no doubt that the Blue Gum campaign provided the impetus which led to the establishment of these two bodies and enabled the organised bushwalking movement to lobby on its own behalf with the aim of preserving bushland and bushwalking country.

The Blue Gum Committee continued its fund-raising activities and on 1 December 1933 was able to repay the loan in full. It presented to Jim Cleary a book of photographs of the forest compiled in his honour, with a hand-painted frontispiece by Alan Rigby.

In October 1936 Jim Cleary paid an emotional first visit to Blue Gum Forest. More than 100 campers had come to Blue Gum and after tea on Sunday evening, they converged on Cleary's camp with flashing torches. A short, sincere ceremony, some words of thanks from Em Austen of SBW, and a surprised Cleary was honoured with



It was the bushwalkers' prompt action which secured the Blue Gum Forest and helped to lay the foundation for ongoing decades of conservation work. The magnificent trees, which have withstood the passing of centuries, stand as a reminder of this. □

Colin Gibson is a Sydney-based bushwalker who has walked extensively in eastern Australia. A bush regenerator by trade, his interests include poetry, botany and the history of forest conservation. Information for this feature was obtained from material written by Lawry (1932, 1934); Holesgrove (1936); Hyman (1937); Turner (1962); Dunphy (1965) and Macqueen (1997), with additional information from *The Hiker and Bushwalker* (1932); *The Bushwalker* (1937, 1940) and the Myles Dunphy papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Don't go chasing waterfalls

The first descent of one of South-west Tasmania's
wildest rivers, by Neil Thomas,



wild rafting



the chopper blades beat downwards as the craft lifted from the button grass amidst a crescendo of thumping, swirling noise. I lay face down across my equipment, buffeted by the wash of air. As the helicopter took off the tail rotor snicked a woody button-grass flower, which exploded in a stinging spray—and then the craft was airborne and circling high across the heat of the plain. The pilot swung the chopper back for a low pass and a final wave before disappearing from view over a scrubby ridge. The noise of the engine receded and the silence of the bush moved in again to fill the valley.

I stood up in the heat—the temperature was close to 40°C—shouldered 55 kilograms of equipment and then moved off across the button grass to the distant tree line where the river was. Large clumps of button grass dotting the plain soon gave way to dense scrub, followed by thigh-deep black mud, tea-trees and then twisted and fallen eucalypts that sheltered flood debris in the crook of every branch. The river hid behind a final grove of paper-barks.

On reaching the river I dropped the heavy pack and knelt on the gently sloping bank to drink the cool, clear water that raced across the sandy riverbed. Leaning back I absorbed the deep solitude of the bush and considered my position.

After a year of investigation and preparation I was now at the headwaters of 'my' wild Tasmanian river that had, to the best of my knowledge, never been descended. I had researched its scant history from its discovery in the winter of 1896 by a government party led by the experienced surveyor EG Innes. Innes wrote in his government report that on 7 July his party had crossed a 'large stream' flowing through a deep gorge, that he had named it and that, after crossing it, his party had passed through some of the roughest country over which he had ever travelled. Innes then carried on with his assigned task of seeking a route to the west coast.

Afterwards, the river was largely forgotten except for occasional activity by piners in the interwar years. I checked for more recent activity in the area with such informed people as Richard Flanagan and Helen Gee, who have both written books on the rivers of the South-west and have taken part in a number of first descents. I also spoke with Grant Anderson, a Tasmanian kayak paddler who was in the first party to descend the Gordon River after Olegas Truchanas. He, too, has participated in a number of first descents. None had ever heard of any activity on my river. Even 'Wild's own' John Chapman, the seasoned bushwalker and author of several Tasmanian bushwalking guidebooks, knew of no one who had been into the region of this forgotten stream.

As I sat in the shade by the river I deliberately confronted my situation, and my vulnerability. This was a lonely river without escape routes and without nearby tracks or roads; just mountains, scrub, ravines and more rivers. Should I get into

trouble there would be no one to help me. From now on every move I made would have to be considered, slow and deliberate as even a minor sprain could prove catastrophic. There was only one way out—down river. In five weeks' time I was to meet a seaplane off the State's south-west coast. Five weeks to wait for someone to miss me would be a long time were I to have an accident.

I glanced along the course of the narrow river, only five metres wide at this early stage—little more than a creek. It ran northwards through the wreckage of a collapsed

drowned by static. Darkness descended on the river and a southern boobook let go with the first 'hoot' of the evening.

I advanced three kilometres the next day, wading thigh-deep down the river through thick forest, testing with a pole for depth and deadfall. At times the nature of the forest changed from scrub to rainforest, complete with tree ferns and bracken, but one thing remained constant; the number of fallen trees that blocked the river. Some were fresh deadfalls, showing recent wounds and still covered in branches and browning leaves. Others were ancient,



An example of the huge log-jams the author had to negotiate on the Wanderer River. Pages 50 and 51, the author checking his raft for damage. Page 51, journey's end; the author at the mouth of the Wanderer, wearing a plastic bag for a hat and a garbage bag for a coat, having lost his Gore-Tex jacket in a capsizse several days earlier. All photos Neil Thomas

tree, only knee-deep. I entered the water and waded along it until late afternoon. Then I camped on a flood bank marked with wombat- and wallaby tracks and as night fell I listened to the 'quacking' of a Tasmanian tree frog and the calls of a crescent honey-eater, at times barely audible above the droning of mosquitoes. I flicked the dial on a pocket radio. Elvis briefly filled the earphones with 'tell me am I getting through'(!) until his voice was

rotting logs that supported sprightly growths of native laurel. Sassafras, leatherwood, myrtle, horizontal scrub and bauera joined with fallen gums to obstruct the river. Tea-tree and cutting grass often crowded in from the river-banks, blocking even the thought of escape.

It had been a dry summer in the South-west and the lack of rain worked to my advantage. Because of the low river level it was often easier to crawl or slide under the log-jams than to try to climb over the top, or to seek a route around the river through the thick scrub.

Once, as I slithered under a log-jam, the weight of the pack grinding me into the sand and rocks of the riverbed, I lifted my face to see what seemed to be a large and interesting growth of fungus hanging from the densely compacted scrub above my head. Prodding it with a stick the 'fungus'

revealed itself as an envelope of putrid flesh that fell open and scattered the bones of a hapless animal in the shallow water near my head. I quickly slithered away, startling a baby eel that leaped from a puddle and writhed across a small sand bar, narrowly beating me to the deeper water.

Many log-jams hampered my progress. At times I was driven up into the thick scrub and forest to force a way round large trees that had fallen lengthways along the river, their protruding branches catching flood-driven debris and blocking progress for 50 or 100 metres. Sometimes the quick-



est way to deal with the smaller log-jams was to dismantle them by hand, tearing away the branches and boughs and then sliding through to the other side.

My river grew wider and deeper as I descended, the bottom changing from hard, white sand to soft, dark sand with the occasional bed of quartzite pebbles or bars of limestone. Limestone gorges appeared in places and I had to swim through them; infrequent, small shingle rapids tempted me to set up the raft. At one point I looked up from my sodden trudging and was startled to see a ridge lying directly ahead. The river disappeared beneath it, running underground like a huge drainage tunnel for 50 metres before reappearing on the other side. In winter the area at the mouth of the tunnel must fill up like a huge cistern with the ridge damming back the waters and the river thundering down through the tunnel

under great pressure and shooting out at the other side. I swam through the dark passage, again thankful for the low river level.

After eight days and less than 20 kilometres of progress I found evidence of someone having been on my river before; a pincer's saw mark on the first of the fallen logs of Huon pine. By this time I had blown up the raft and was swimming and wading behind it down river.

Although I knew that I was now getting close to the lower reaches of my river, I still did not know my exact position. I had entered the river at a nondescript point from a button-grass plain and it had then snaked along its course without discernible orienting features on either the river or the largest-scale map of the area available, a 1:100 000 Tasmap. Even the distance travelled each day was difficult to estimate accurately while wading, slithering and swimming downstream.

Knowing that the major river into which my river emptied was close I pushed on with fresh energy, startling a pied cormorant that slapped the water with wet wings for 20 metres before finally taking to the air and flying northwards.

At the next bend in my river sunlight glinted off the black fur of a Tasmanian devil as it scuttled across some river rocks, interrupted from feeding upon a dead acquaintance—maybe a former family member—that had now been reduced to a smelly, pink-and-black pulp.

Shortly after sighting the devil I set up the paddles and actually sat in the raft. My thrill was short-lived, however, as I soon hit the first of a number of shallow, boulder-strewn sections. I was forced to clamber with pack, raft and paddles between the short patches that could be navigated, each lasting for only a few hundred metres. I would then have to jump out and clamber over rocks to the next deep water. The slippery boulders made for slow, frustrating and dangerous progress until I finally loaded myself into the raft and—unwittingly—paddled round the last bend and out into the mouth of my river.

The second river roared past, running a banker and throwing white water into the air, tugging on the bushes on the far bank and swirling in a whirlpool at the confluence with my river. Shocked and unprepared for its sudden appearance—and state—I frantically back-paddled. I was in no condition to tackle such a river with both feet, still shod in sodden boots and gaiters, hanging over the sides of the raft.

I retreated from the mouth of my river and clambered up on to a small ridge to camp. I had earlier promised myself the reward of a tin of Camembert on reaching this point. Despite the rich, moist cheese I 'celebrated' that night with a dry mouth, my unease heightened by a darkening sky and the knowledge that the barometer had been steadily falling for several days.

Because I had to backpack all equipment and supplies, my 'specialist' rafting gear consisted only of a small, rubberised fabric raft, two aluminium paddle-blades cut from



South-west Tasmania

The force of the current slammed the raft into the branches...I held on waiting for the tear of fabric and a rush of escaping air...

flat sheet, and a pair of wet-suit booties. A life-jacket, helmet and gear barrel had been considered impractical to carry. Now I sorely wished for them!

The second river roared on through the night, indifferent to my concerns.

The next morning I slept late and then used all the spare plastic bags I had for packing. I lashed a bush pole between two trees and then split both ends, inserting the aluminium paddle-blades which I clamped firmly in place with radiator-hose clips. Donning booties and thermals I climbed down to my river under a dark sky and a north wind. I stared in confusion as rocks jutted from it; rocks that had not been there the night before—the river's level had dropped. Excitedly I loaded the raft and paddled down to the second river, listening to the raft scraping over rocks—the beautiful, exposed rocks—the sound filling me with a delight I had not thought possible.

The second river still swirled by, cold, dark, deep and wide, but the whirlpool at the mouth of my river had receded to an eddy and the other's level had dropped. It

As I sat there the sky darkened to an inky black and the north wind blew along the ridgelines, tearing at the trees. A squall raced up the river, spun the raft round and blew it back upstream against the strong current. I leaned forward and held the raft—and the pack between my legs—not even thinking of trying to fight the squall. The wind raced on with sheets of rain following it, falling in veils across the forest. Lightning flashed in the darkness and thunder rolled forward. Counting the time between flash and thunderclap I judged the lightning to be still some distance away. But as I was the only person in the middle of the wide river and waving a set of aluminium paddle-blades in the air, I decided to opt for discretion and paddled over to the pandanus on the eastern bank. The storm had settled in with strong winds and heavy, drenching rain and so I set about making camp. I found what appeared to be an old horse track that followed the bank. I settled down in a camp-site while the eerie calls of currawongs clattered through the lonely river valley.

and spinning it round. I held on waiting for the tear of fabric and a rush of escaping air—not a sound that I wanted to hear while perched at the top of a 100 metre long section of rapids. The small raft took the punishment of the impact and moments later it was buffeted free of the trees. My raft and I were sent careering down the rapids past the rough walls of the cliffs.

Days later I reached the mouth of the second river and then paddled ten kilo-



Typical terrain on the middle Wanderer River. Right, small beginnings; camp at the air-drop site at the start of the Wanderer River descent.

had not fallen a lot but any drop was a godsend compared with its level of the previous day. The height must have been caused by a release of excess water from a dam upstream.

With spirits renewed I paddled out into the confluence and was immediately swept away by the current into a fast-moving section of water. The small raft sat easily in the dark swirl of the second river and by paddling hard into the faster moving sections it rode out each set of rapids as it presented itself. A sense of relief soon filled my mind, and I began to feel comfortable with this river and with the abilities of the raft.

The rest of the journey down the second river was uneventful apart from an incident at the mouth of a tributary that further tested the abilities of the small raft. There the second river narrows and dark, limestone cliffs fall straight into the water on its east side. The tributary was emptying two days' rain into the other river's west side and I could hear the rush of the rapids as I approached. With the raft having the steering capabilities of a wet sponge I took an early line for a small island at the mouth of the tributary intending to go round its west side and putting as much distance as possible between myself and the fierce rush of water past the cliffs. With the river on which I was bobbing narrowing and its speed increasing I realised too late that the 'island' was a flooded clump of tea-trees. The force of the current slammed the raft into the branches, stopping all forward movement

metres south into an inlet of Macquarie Harbour, sped along by a 20 knot north-east wind that sent swells rolling across the harbour and slopping into the raft. At the southern end of the inlet I paddled up the Birches River to a dilapidated mining-company landing, packed up the raft and then slushed through the marsh up to higher ground. A large, black tiger snake that lay coiled amongst the sedge raised itself and flattened its head upon seeing me before sliding away into the scrub. As January is the breeding season for black tiger snakes and a time when the males tend to be aggressive, I gave the snake a wide berth. I emerged from the marsh and so did a white-sand-and-quartzite exploration track that ran south, leaving a scar across the open button-grass plains.

I had now entered the 'South West Conservation Area', a region denied World Heritage Listing in 1989 due to strong resistance from the Tasmanian Mines



Department because of continuing mineral exploration programmes. The heyday for mining exploration there was during the 1950s and 1960s when the landing was built and tracks cut across the button grass by bulldozers and other tracked vehicles. At present exploration is apparently limited to occasional helicopter forays by geologists.

I followed the track under grey skies, with winds gusting across the plains. There weren't any trees to forewarn of squalls and

it had been descended only from its lower reaches by a party which included Helen Gee in 1990. Several kilometres down river from where Helen Gee's party had entered it was the site where Damon and Deanne Howes spent a year in 1993 as an *Australian Geographic* 'Wilderness Couple'. I entered the Wanderer at a point much further upstream and was not sure what the river was going to offer. On arrival I was pleased to see that it ran in a trench through the

the river, extending from each bank in the shape of a horseshoe, and consisted of hundreds of compacted logs that totally obscured the river beyond. Climbing to the top of the structure I looked down river and saw only a confused jumble of deadfall and forest growth, a myriad of small rivulets and no river as such. Here the 'river' was totally impassable so I deflated the raft and spent the next five hours working hard to travel less than a kilometre through the forest at river's edge. The surrounding, low country was well suited to the growth of the protected Huon pine and the area was dotted with a number of the large trees as well as with clusters of treacherous cutting grass.

I emerged slashed and bleeding back on to the Wanderer where it was still broken into several streams. Choosing the largest of these I drifted down through a series of log-jams until the Wanderer opened up and began to move across a wide, deep base. It merged with the Conder River and from there I ran down to the coast over fast, shrill rapids, the river only slowing in the lower few kilometres before spilling out into the ocean at a storm-swept Christmas Cove.

Deflating the raft I walked south through thick, coastal scrub that ended in sea-cliffs and rocky beaches, on the way to a rendezvous with a seaplane in several days' time. While scrabbling round rocky gulches I met a pair of abalone divers and their deck-hand, working close to the shore north of the Mainwaring River. They had a full hold of abalone and were completing a final dive before heading back round the southern tip of Tasmania to the docks and food shops of Hobart.

I decided to hitch a ride with the divers back to the east coast. The approach of a storm front could have meant days spent waiting for the weather to clear sufficiently for a plane to land, while the abalone boat offered immediate transport to the nearest fish and chips shop.

Standing on the bridge of *Muddy Waters* I reflected on the trip as the sunset threw a final glow on to the ranges of the west coast and the vessel's bows sliced through the southerly swell.

South-west Tasmania had, as always, shown many moods and thrown up plenty of challenges.

As I watched the mutton-birds riding the first winds of the storm I hoped that this part of Tasmania would always remain as it is today, an amazing piece of Australian wilderness. ☺

Any parties contemplating the use of helicopters in the Tasmanian World Heritage Area must first seek the permission of the Parks & Wildlife Service. To protect its wilderness status, the identity of the river descended—possibly for the first time—by the author has not been revealed.

Neil Thomas, 33, has had a range of occupations from miner's prospector to camel handler; at present he is a self-employed management consultant. His recent epic adventures have included a solo traverse of much of Tasmania's west coast (an account of this was published in *Wild* no 56) and an ascent—in the company of a Dani tribesman guide—of New Guinea's second-highest peak.

each fresh one slammed, unannounced, into the bulkiness of my pack-encumbered body. As I walked, occasionally a ground parrot burst from the button grass with a brief glimpse of green and orange feathers, and then flitted to a new position never far away. These are the less colourful cousins of the endangered orange-bellied parrot at present the subject of a conservation programme in the South-west.

I left the track after a few days and walked across to the upper reaches of the Wanderer River, to the site where I had flung boxes of food from a diving aircraft several weeks earlier. I had only a few days' food left and was looking forward to the prospect of chocolate, pancakes, dried meat and other delights. I found the crumpled boxes of food, studded out in a neat line across the button grass, gathered them up and then spent a day feasting before I tackled the descent of the Wanderer River.

That river was named in 1879 by Tom Moore, a prospector/explorer, after his dog.

button grass and that there were neither log-jams nor forest in sight.

I inflated the raft and began to paddle, making good initial progress until the Wanderer began to twist and slice through ridges, and thick forest closed around the water. The riverbed broke up into a wide, rock-strewn channel through which one could not paddle. I had to jump from rock to rock, guiding or dragging the raft through the gaps. It was slow and tedious going; each bend showed that the rock corridor continued. It took a full day to travel a few kilometres until the riverbed changed and small rapids gushed between relatively gentle sections of water.

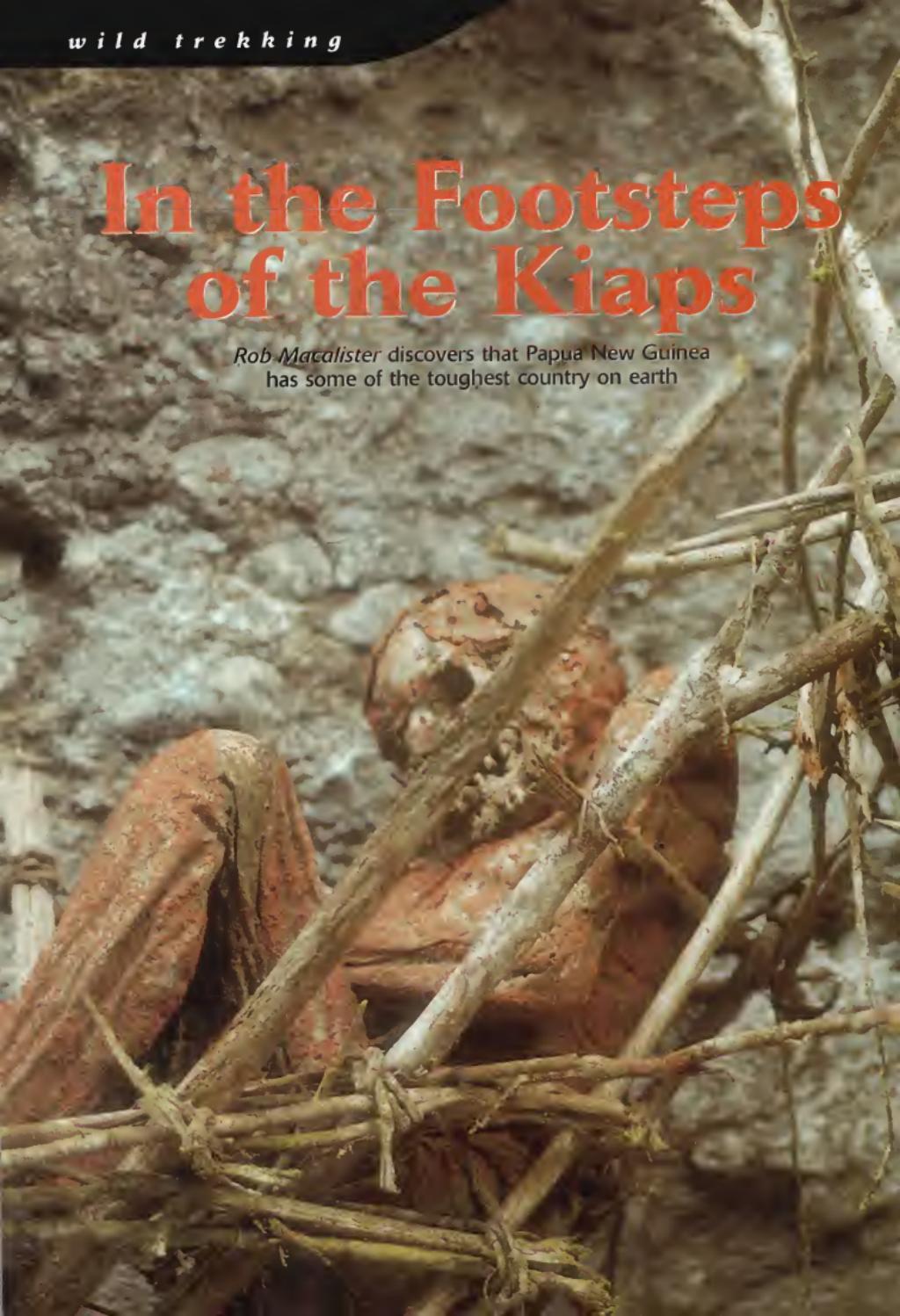
Log-jams became an occasional feature but the river soon grew wide and I became confident of making a clean descent. That was until I approached the junction of the Conder River.

There I came across the biggest log-jam that I had yet seen, lying across the river like a huge barricade. It completely filled

w i l d t r e k k i n g

In the Footsteps of the Kiaps

Rob Macalister discovers that Papua New Guinea has some of the toughest country on earth





the patrols into unexplored Papua New Guinea by Australian *kiaps* in the 1920s and 1930s were incredible tests of human endurance.

Kiap is a local name for a government officer of the pre-Independence Australian administration in PNG. The *kiaps*' job was to explore the country and establish government influence. In the days before air travel or roads the *kiaps* travelled by foot. The challenges of trekking were not confined to snakes, malaria, high rainfall, flooded rivers, tropical heat and the rugged landscape. The *kiaps* made many of the first European contacts with tribal groups in inland PNG. Sometimes they met hostility from communities who saw white people for the first time. Because of the lengthy time of the patrols the *kiaps* had to negotiate with the same people for food and supplies. (Air drops were only used in PNG patrols after 1940.)

during the last few weeks Champion had to be carried after being injured.

● Jack Hides's 1935 Strickland-Purari patrol lasted five-and-a-half months and established the first contact with many groups in the Great Papuan Plateau and Central Highlands. Members of the patrol were constantly challenged by belligerent tribes, flooded rivers and the horrors of the limestone country. At least 32 tribesmen were killed by the patrol in 'self-defence'. Hides was to die of pneumonia two years later after another patrol up the Strickland River.

● Champion's 1936 Bamu-Purari patrol lasted an incredible eight months—of which 26 days were spent trying to cross the Kikori River.

Having lived in PNG for several years I was already familiar with the significant challenges of trekking its

of supplies were not considered. Instead, we would eat local food supplemented by small parcels of dehydrated food we had sent to several government- or mission outposts along our planned route. Unlike the *kiaps*, we would carry our own packs, which included a week's supply of survival rations in case we became isolated from settlements by flooded rivers or the like.

Huddled in a village hut on the banks of the mighty Fly River one July evening, I realised that we were on the threshold of a unique adventure. Months of planning were



The author (the tall one) on a return visit to Anga country in 1993. Rob Macalister collection. Right, the dreaded limestone country, north of the route taken and altered by burn-off. In the *kiaps'* words, 'simply the most hungry, most difficult country in the world'. Susan Turner, Pages 56 and 57, the people of the Anga area, where the author's trek ended, traditionally preserved the dead by smoking the bodies and storing them in caves. Macalister

wild interior and had also read the accounts of some of the great *kiap* explorations. I proceeded to plan a trek to rival these *kiap* patrols, at least in terms of distance covered.

Starting at the Fly River, we planned to trek east—crossing large rivers such as the Strickland, Kikori and Purari—through the heart of the Great Papuan Plateau and the limestone country south of the Central Highlands, before entering the Highlands around Karimui. It was an ambitious route and we knew that we might encounter difficulties just as the *kiaps* had done but we hoped that they would not be insurmountable.

Unlike the *kiaps*, who had travelled as independently as possible (often cutting their own tracks and trekking without local guides), we planned to use local knowledge and local skills to the maximum. We were to develop a successful pattern of hiring a couple of village men as guides to lead us on the tracks that linked villages. At every tribal boundary we changed guides so that they spoke the local language and knew the area. As a shoe-string expedition, air drops

now a memory and our expedition had become reality. With me were three Australians, Jeff Dean and Jo-Anne Girdham were to complete the trek while the other member of the party, who had not trekked extensively in PNG before, soon left us.

Apart from the initial personnel difficulty, the first couple of weeks went well. We travelled by canoe and foot through flooded grasslands and a rainforest wilderness to a remote village called Dwalekimage. There we rested for three days, searching for a suitable canoe to take us across the Strickland River. Finally, we set off through the broken water and soon headed into another river; its steep banks were draped with rainforest and the scarlet flowers of the D'Albertis creeper.

Memories of the modern world quickly began to fade as we immersed ourselves in our new environment. The level of monolingualism in the villages to which we now came indicated how little outside contact there had been in this area. Our canoe journey from Dwalekimage had taken us to the edge of the Great Papuan Plateau, through which Hides had trekked in his 1935 Strickland-Purari patrol. The first tribal group we met here were the Biami. Patrols first explored Biami territory in the

The toughest *kiap* patrols had been in the south-west corner of PNG—the last major area of the country to be explored by the government. These included:

● Champion's and Karius's patrol which for the first time crossed New Guinea at its widest part. In their second attempt to complete the patrol, in 1927, they trekked over the Victor Emanuel Range from the Fly River and down into the headwaters of the Sepik River. (Mt Fubilan, in the Victor Emanuel Range, has a rainfall of 11 metres a year!) The patrol took three-and-a-half months;

1970s and today it remains rich in culture. Our maps covering this particular area read 'Relief Data Incomplete'. In fact, maps were soon to prove unreliable, especially as villages move regularly and many of them are incorrectly marked on the map.

A week later we successfully crossed the Great Papuan Plateau, to arrive at the Kikori River in heavy rain. The swollen waters confirmed our fears that we would be unable to cross where we had planned. Champion's patrol had spent 26 days trying to cross this river. Rainfall data for the area

battling swamps and crossing rivers and streams swollen by persistent rain. Every day we passed through as many as three different language groups, each a new challenge as we negotiated our way through its territory. One morning I woke to the rare sight of receding waters and clear skies, when a scorpion crawled out of my bedding. I was to carry the incident in my mind throughout the trip as a salient reminder never to be too confident in this strange and wild environment.

The day we reached the mission settlement of Sambenig another week later was, for me at least, the hardest of the expedition. We had trekked through wilderness to arrive on the third day at the foot of a large limestone range. Due to communication difficulties with a village guide, we realised too late that we had missed the last stream before the waterless limestone. Our reserves did not last out the day and we later found ourselves exhausted and irritable, following an invisible track. We succumbed on our last two cu-

cumbers for liquid. We found a pool of mud and filtered and treated it and drank the foul beverage which tasted of dirt and chlorine.

The words of Jack Hides, one of the *hiaps* who explored the country, came back:

...describe this limestone?...describe the difficulties it presents to men who try to cross it? It is a frightful stretch of country...the rock honeycombed and standing on end...the fissures and craters large and small...appearing bottomless to the eye...sometimes with the rumble of underground rivers far below, in our ears...every step has to be watched for the limestone edges are as sharp as broken glass.

Constant rain and mud had caused a bad fungal infection on my feet several days earlier. If the infection were to get worse, Sambenig, with an airstrip, was where we wanted to be, not in the middle of the jungle. By the third day of the trek to Sambenig, the pain in my feet had become acute, compounded by dehydration. We finally reached a stream on the other side of the limestone and dragged our weary bodies into a welcoming village. I removed my boots to find that the infection had spread rapidly during that last day and for

PNG trekking tips

The potential for trekking in PNG is vast. There are spectacular landforms, rainforests and cultures in abundance. The whole country is criss-crossed by village tracks, and experience has shown that these can be successfully used to trek through even the most remote and most rugged areas. The following tips for private expeditions in remote areas are drawn from extensive first-hand experience:

- Work through the village people. They know the area and the culture better than anyone. Always employ at least two local guides even if you think that you do not need them. They can act as intermediaries in explaining who you are and why you are there. They are your best guarantee for safe trekking. Change guides when you pass into a new tribal or language group. Try not to take outside guides into another tribe's territory—if the guides' tribe is considered a traditional enemy, you may find a shortage of hospitality.
- Treat villagers fairly and with respect. Be sure to pay your way. K5–K7 is a very fair daily wage for guides in remote areas. Carriers are paid about K5. Be prepared to pay extra to guides who have to travel a long way home when their job is finished. Always establish pay rates clearly and in advance. Offer to pay for accommodation and food. Accommodation can generally be found in village houses for K2 a person a night. Share your food and your company with your village hosts.
- Be well prepared culturally. Do not just take your equipment and route. Basic *Tok Pisin* skills are almost essential in remote areas. Learn something about the cultures among which you will be. For example, learn local attitudes to women (vastly different from our own) and how women trekkers should act and behave. Be aware that everything is owned and has value—every bush, every tree, every stone. Also remember that things work at a different pace in PNG. Try not to hassle if things are not organised as quickly as you would like. Go with the flow as much as possible and have a flexible itinerary to allow for plane or canoe connections in remote areas; and for unforeseen problems.
- Consider doing a commercial trek first. Good treks, operated by reputable companies, are available for such diverse places as Mt Wilhelm, Kokoda Trail and the Tari Basin. They are an excellent introduction to PNG and you can learn a lot about how to conduct your own expedition through seeing a professional, local guide at work.
- Take a 'low-tech' approach. Although crime is not a problem in areas away from roads, try not to offer temptations to villagers who are very poor by our material standards. Petty theft in a village because someone has left boots lying around only causes ill-feeling on both sides. Although good gear is important, consider going as 'low-tech' as possible. The more sophisticated your material possessions, the bigger the distance you are putting between yourself and the people you have come to visit. We used plastic tarpaulins instead of tents and always tried to eat local food.
- Do not be put off by high air fares and media sensationalism about PNG. Trekking is relatively cheap and immensely rewarding!

were scanty but scary. Whereas August is the dry season up river, down river it is the rainy season. One of the two nearest outposts where rainfall data had been collected was Kikori (downstream) with up to 750 millimetres of rain a month! We decided to detour south, trekking three days downstream to the next village in search of a canoe and calmer water.

We eventually made a successful crossing of the Kikori River by canoe six days later, far downstream near the junction of the Kikori and Mubi Rivers. On the first day we were caught in a torrential rainstorm that flooded the river plain across which we were trekking. We had to wade through a liquid landscape, unable to see our feet. That night seemed unreal—curled up on the ledge of a limestone outcrop that stood alone, like a ship anchored in the flooded forest. It was a consolation of our detour that by following the Mubi north we had the chance to visit the sensational Wassi Falls—PNG's largest waterfall—and the Foe people who live in the area.

Our trek had brought many challenges to date and more were to come as we left the Mubi River and penetrated deeper into the limestone country. We followed faint hunting tracks through thick jungle, always

the next three days I had to let the sun dry, and medicine heal, my battered feet while the other two relaxed.

Soon it was time to trek on and several days later, as we dropped down the sheer sides of the Erave Gorge in torrential rain, I felt the first real anticipation of crossing the nearby Purari River. To my mind at least, it was always going to be the greatest physical challenge of the trip. The middle Purari ran through a massive, limestone gorge and there were few villagers anywhere near the river who would know how and where to cross. But for now, my mind concentrated on escaping leeches, for here their quantity and their appetite for human blood remain unrivaled in my experience.

The next day we canoed down a smooth section of the Erave River. We called in at the last village before the river joined the Purari. An old longhouse decorated with jawbones was at the centre. A group of their people had just left to cross the Purari to visit Kanimui for a singing [dance festival with some distant relatives. If we hurried we could catch them and cross the treacherous river with them. But who was to take us? Only a few young men were left and their elders recounted the deaths of other sons and daughters on the river. Eventually the elders agreed that the young men could take us and we resumed our river journey, floating through spectacular scenery in the warm, red light of dusk. The Erave entered rapids again in its final, head-

long rush to join with the Purari, and we camped that night in a vegetable garden on the edge of the river.

The next day we climbed the sheer wall of the gorge, hanging on to stumps and rocks as we crossed numerous landslips. At day's end we reached the junction of the laro and the Erave Rivers, about two kilometres in a straight line from where we had started. Rough shelters constructed by the other group stood on the river-bank and the coals in the fire were still warm. They had left that day, but were now a day ahead of us. And there were no canoes on our side of the laro.

One of our village guides casually began to strip off his clothes. As it dawned on me that he was going to attempt to swim the laro River to look for a canoe on the other side, the fears expressed by the elders the day before came flooding back. I insisted that he dress, and stripped myself. It was an ominous scene. A few kilometres upstream from where we stood, the laro disappeared underground, to re-emerge a few hundred

metres away. Only here, in a 50 metre stretch, was there relatively flat water. But downstream, between two large rocks, one could see the white foam where the laro and the Erave clashed; massive pressure waves danced on the horizon.

I managed to make the swim without major drama. Dragging my naked body over the muddy bank, I spied a cave where stood two paddles roughly hewn from a green stick and a piece of bark. I soon found two flooded canoes by the water's edge. The canoes were rough, the paddles small and fragile, and the current unsettling, but I had to try to get the canoes back if we were to get our whole party across. I motioned for one of the others to stand on the rocks with a rope in case there were difficulties. gingerly I launched the canoes but as the current hit, their bows spun round and suddenly I was heading straight downstream. The paddles flexed dangerously as I tried in vain to change direction. A whirlpool swung me back on course but the rocks were approaching rapidly. I called



Photos clockwise from above: 1. 'Our forced detour down the Kikori River allowed us to visit the largest falls in Papua New Guinea, Wassi Falls on the Mubi River.' 2. Women's houses near the Mubi River. 3. Young boy from Okapa taking part in a singing. 4. Boy from Biambi, sporting a pierced nasal septum and wearing a necklace of araxia seeds. 5. People in traditional dress on the edge of Anga country. Turner

for the rope and in one motion was able to catch and lash it to the canoe as the current swung me into the channel and the rope stopped me from being dragged off into the waiting rapids.

The village guides made some modifications and after more tense, wet moments we all managed to cross the river and that night we slept in the cave. The next day I set off with a

lightened pack and the strongest of the guides to try to catch the other group. It is impossible to describe that day's trekking. There were no tracks and my village guide had only been here once, yet he managed to track the other group. Atop a mighty cliff I edged out to the light behind some trees and found myself on an overhang of matted root in a huge box canyon of sheer-sided limestone and there, glittering in the sun, was the white foam of the distant Purari River. Happy scenes ensued when we finally met the other group from the village. We arrived at a camp in a cave adorned with petroglyphs, where a possum and large tree-kangaroo were brought in by the hunters for cooking. We waited for the

Purari River. The awesome landscape stole the day. The Purari broadened into a large pool. Blue skies and a gravel beach set the scene as we crossed by canoe and slept in another cave, surrounded by taro gardens and happy people. The 500 metre limestone cliffs of the gorge glittered and delineated our world in the full moon. We had travelled eight kilometres in three days through the wildest country imaginable and now had our reward in a sumptuous display of natural beauty.

Over the next ten days we trekked through the Karimui area and into Eastern Highlands Province. We steadily gained altitude—now trekking at between 1700 and 3000 metres. Classic Highlands land-

scapes and people had caught in the bush with our guides, and the familiar hospitality and warm friendship of the people are etched in our memories. Still, we craved privacy. Many villages through which we trekked had only one house. Particularly on the Great Papuan Plateau, the whole village traditionally slept in one, communal longhouse, the women separated from the men by internal walls. As most of the villages still had longhouses we were to become part of the community—living, eating and sleeping in the longhouse. We came to realise that privacy is simply not part of the culture.

The next depot we had established for food and supplies was at a coffee plantation near the Lamari River on the edge of Anga territory. The penultimate day there took us 12 hours. Departing from the village where we had slept, an old woman thought Jo-Anne to be her dead daughter who had now returned in the form of a white woman. It was an unsettling time; taking our leave among wailing women while the fine silhouettes of casuarina floated in the cool morning mists that swirled around the ridgeline hamlet. This was the area where *kuru* occurred, a viral infection causing madness and immobility. *Kuru* is acquired through eating human brains, and has a lengthy incubation period. Although this local ritual has officially been stopped, the effects of *kuru* could still be seen among some of the people we encountered.

The plantation was run by an expatriate with a colonial lifestyle, ensconced in luxury among the people with whom we had been living for the last weeks. We knew that they had little understanding of the material wealth and the strange motivations of this white man and his fellows.

It was here that we decided to end our journey. We had trekked for two months, covered more than 600 kilometres, and arrived at the plantation on the day set in our schedule. We had followed our intended route with a minimum of forced detours in an area where a lot of first European contact had been within our own, short lifetime. We had crossed four of PNG's six largest rivers and had followed a new route through, in Hide's words, 'simply the most hungry, most difficult country in the world'. We had done so faster than the *hiap* patrols, and without major medical problems. We had experienced nothing but friendship and help from the people we had met, and uneasily we headed back to the modern world, thin and weary. Temporarily purged of masochistic urges and incalculably richer in experience, we had also begun to understand what truly remarkable feats of endurance the early *hiap* patrols had been.

rest of our party to catch up—they soon did—and we dined royally on the meat cooked in the hot stones of an earth oven.

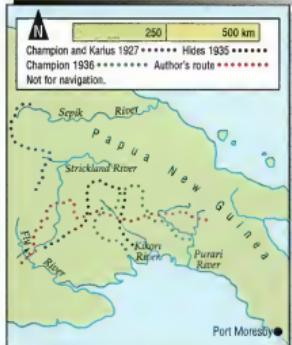
The next day, luck remained on our side. A Karimui man had left his canoe on our side of the river. No longer did we have to contemplate swimming or building our own canoe or raft. Accompanied by the nervous song of our party, we entered the gorge of

scapes and people began to predominate. Gone were the lanky, dark-skinned Papuans with their sago and longhouses, to be replaced by fairer-skinned, stocky Highlanders living in dense settlements among their sweet-potato gardens. The constant pressure of people began to weigh on us, as we were still strange, unexplained phenomena in their part of the world; it seemed as though we were asked a thousand questions and shook a thousand hands every day.

The villagers could not understand why we wanted to trek through their country. Surely someone must be paying us to do it? Used to missionaries or government officers, their experience of white people did not extend to those without a message to preach but who simply enjoyed the environment, the cultures and the challenges. The missions showed their influence in other ways—often we would be asked when the world was going to end and what was going to happen. Another common question was where the things we carried had come from and who had made them. We always struggled to answer in a way that could be understood by our interrogators.

Notwithstanding all the attention, the people and their cultures remained fascinating to the end. A *singsing* we had stumbled across in Biami, goanna and cassowary

Papua New Guinea



The Age

Tuesday, 30th June, 1936

BURIED IN THE SNOW THREE MEN IN THE ALPS RESCUED MAN'S STORY

Harry Stephenson's account of his headline-making journey across the Victorian Alps in 1936

The ice-cumber'd gorges,
The vast seas of snow,
There the torrents drive upward
Their rock-strangled hum,
There the avalanche thunders
The hoarse torrent durn.
I come, O ye mountains!
Ye torrents, I come!

Matthew Arnold

The ranges of northern Gippsland, by reason of their inaccessibility and rugged-nature, are not so well known or so often visited as many less interesting sections of the north-eastern alpine system.

Early in March 1936, Frank Schroder, Alan Wilson and I conceived the idea of visiting Mt Wellington in midwinter and, if conditions proved favourable, to explore some of the country to the north of that peak.

After three months of thorough planning and organisation we were ready for the start and on 13 June we journeyed down to Heyfield and thence to the Glenmaggie Reservoir. After spending a very pleasant evening with the Ostberg family, we slept in an old hut near the reservoir that night. The following morning we crossed the retaining wall of the dam—with a distant view of the Baw Baws, heavily capped with snow—and followed a track to the picturesque home of Jack Wilson. After a chat and a mug of black tea we moved on and lunched at Blooms Hut. Continuing along the track past Ben Cruachan, we camped on the spur just short of the Golden Point Creek for the night. Our 56-pound (70 convert the imperial units used throughout this

article to metric, see note at end. Editor) packs proved to be manageable if a little cumbersome! —

Next morning we followed the Golden Point Creek down to its junction with the Avon River and lunched at the Golden Point Hut. Then followed four miles (and 31 crossings) of Stockyard Creek. We left the creek a little prematurely and by mistake started to climb the spur immediately to the east of Purgatory Spur.

We made camp on this spur, but it meant that Frank and I had to spend almost an hour dropping down to a gully for water. The next day we continued along the scrubby spur, eventually crossing over the actual summit of Mt Hump and regaining the track a mile further on. A little further still, we walked into the first patches of snow and then camped for the night on the Razorback. Our camp had a splendid view of the Gable End; around its base there was evidence of recent, extensive fires.

Leaving the Razorback, we climbed through deep snow and lunched in the partial shelter of some snow-laden gums on Gable End. Fog, the constant companion of the Wellington Plateau, was with us, and combined with a driving mist made conditions unpleasant and our task of locating Millers Hut difficult.

Steering by compass we trudged along throughout the afternoon and at nightfall were rewarded with a glimpse of Millers Stockyard just ahead.

Despite the heavy fog, we set out next day on a tour of the plateau. We visited Riggall Old Hut, were defeated by the weather in our attempt to reach Lake Tali Karg, and in the afternoon climbed to the summit of Mt Wellington. This, we suspect,

was the first winter ascent of Wellington but we were not rewarded with any views.

Our hopes for fine weather were realised the following morning when we awoke to a cloudless dawn. We hurried over breakfast and set off along the snow-covered track which leads to the Bennison Signpost. Those three miles will always remain one of my most pleasant memories. We trudged along through the glistening snow, with gums heavily weighed down by snow on either side of us. On one side rose Spion Kopje and on the other, the peak of Wellington was bathed in sunshine.

The Bennison Signpost was reached in an hour and so warm was the day that we stripped down to singlets for the trek across the extensive snow plains to the north of Wellington. We lunched on a rocky outcrop from where we had excellent views of the Crinoline, Tamboritha, Reynard and the Moroka valley. A marvellous, mystic lake filled the whole of the Moroka valley and was a dazzling white in the sunshine.

During the afternoon we followed a well-defined track to the Carey Plain where we camped on the Carey River for the night. Well-meaning friends had warned us of the futility of attempting the trip under winter conditions owing to the alleged impossibility of following snow-covered tracks. Here, as on the Howitt Plains where we later came across more than two feet of snow, a faint hollow in the snow denoted the presence of a summer track beneath, and was always sufficient guide for us to follow.

The Carey River camp was the coldest of the trip and without any doubt the coldest any of us had ever experienced. Bags of water left outside the tents not only froze on top—this happened every night—but froze solid. In the morning, water obtained from beneath the surface ice of the river froze on top before breakfast was cooked.

Soon after leaving the Carey Plain we were in trouble. Most parties who have crossed this section in summer have difficulties with the confusing winding of the timbered ridge to Mt Arbuckle and we were no exception. Numerous blind spurs higher than the main ridge lead off and, owing to the thick timber that obscures the view, we often travelled half a mile before discovering our error. It would be correct to say that we found our way by trial and error—much trial and many errors!

With dusk approaching we came upon the 'Government Track' on the side of Mt Arbuckle and in 200 yards we were on top. Opinion was divided on the subject of a

camp-site and a fortunate chance view of the Bennison Plain a short distance below made us decide to get down before darkness set in.

In the half-light, Alan was snow-ploughing in the lead when he saw a hut half a mile ahead. No oasis in the centre of a desert has ever been so welcome a sight to travellers as was that hut. 'It might be Higgins', mumbled Frank, 'and that's always locked!'

In his haste, Alan completely forgot to jump across the creek and he went in up to his waist. Frank was more cautious and only went in up to the knees—and little Audrey laughed and laughed—but, with a cold wind blowing, it was no joke.

Frank was wrong. It wasn't Higgins Hut and the door wasn't locked. As a result of a roaring fire, the snow which had lain six inches deep on the roof slid off with a resounding 'plop, plop' and we settled down to some steady eating. For three months we had wondered about the Mt Wellington-Mt Arbuckle section and we were pleased to have made a safe crossing.

The next morning, in splendid weather, we left Kellys Hut and headed up the creek past a stockyard and through a small gorge to a series of tiny snow plains. Hereabouts the countryside was transformed into a

Towards the Moroka River, Castle Hill and Snowy Bluff thrust their white summits above the horizon while ahead, the steadily rising snow plains led us away from the two round-topped peaks of Tamboritha and Reynard. Our camera shutters clicked constantly as we recorded the beauties of a strange, white world.

We lunched in brilliant sunshine beside a beautiful, snow-crusted gum and later passed a majestic old snow gum, the largest I have ever seen.

In the late afternoon we reached Bryces Fence and the Snowy Plains. From the eastern

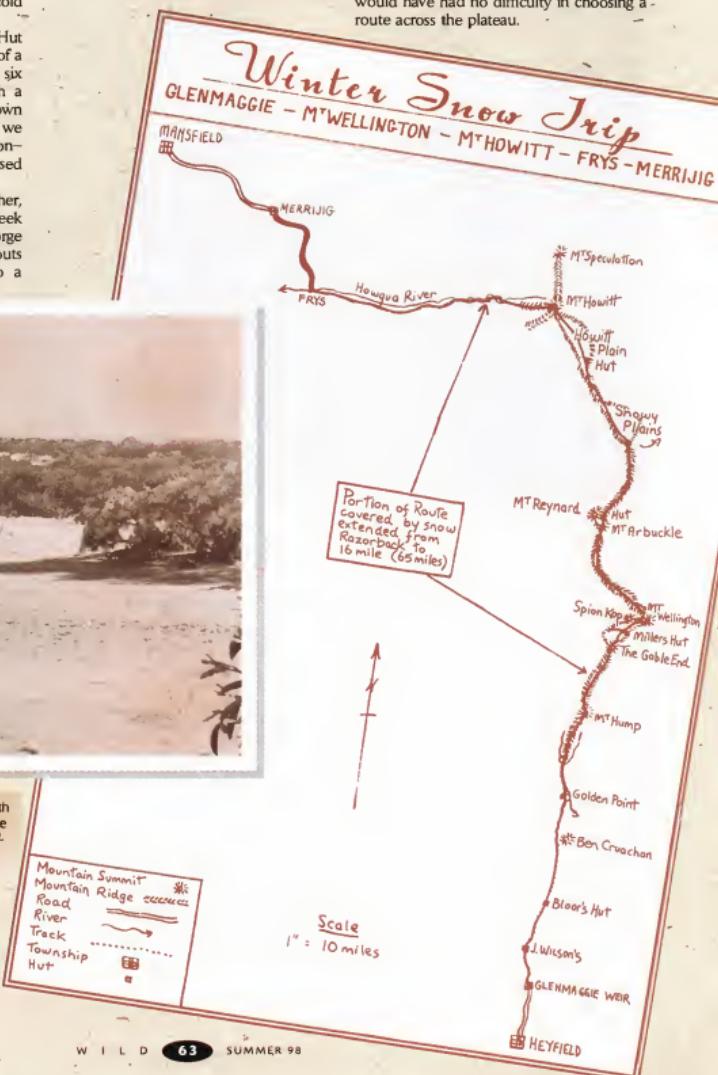
extremity of the old fence we gazed spellbound at Bryces Gorge, a huge declivity; its cliff-faces drop 2000 feet sheer into the valley beneath. In a series of leaps, Bryces Creek plunged over the opposite wall. For an hour we sat in the sun on the warm rocks at the edge of this natural wonder. Later in the trip we saw the justly famed Terrible Hollow (near Mt Howitt) and we all agreed that Bryces Gorge is more impressive.

We camped on the SNowies where, paradoxically, there was less snow than on any other section of the trip. Bare patches of grass were plentiful although a skier would have had no difficulty in choosing a route across the plateau.



The walkers haul their sledge across the North Wellington Plateau. Right, the map of the walk drawn in the author's journal. All uncredited illustrations Harry Stephenson collection

veritable fairyland—snow gums stood bent and twisted under their snowy mantle, fantastic snow crystals glistened in the morning sun and over all reigned a silence broken only by our heavy breathing and crunching foot-steps.



We crossed the Snowy Plains without difficulty the next morning and reached the ridge that leads to Howitt Plains. From Minogues Lookout we were treated to a marvellous view of the Mts Selma-Skene-McDonald section of the Great Dividing Range while away to the north-east the Bogong High Plains, heavily capped with snow, stood out dramatically in the clear atmosphere.

provided an impromptu grandstand; from its branches we obtained an excellent view of the entire Divide from Mt Howitt to Mt Skene.

We lunched at Macalister Springs—and what memories it held for two of us who had camped there in the blistering heat of the previous Christmas.

Terrible Hollow lay at our feet and across the Wonnangatta valley the Barry Mountains

emergency (thus disproving a common theory that petrol stoves are unsatisfactory above 5000 feet) and made the best of our predicament. The falling snow was constantly pressing the sides of our tent in and our formerly cosy bedroom had shrunk to the size of a sardine tin. Our down sleeping-bags were soaked by the wet floor, but we were warm and cosy enough as we settled down for a second night. After a day of



We reached the Howitt Plains Hut for lunch—and what a lunch it was. Months before, Arthur Guy had packed in a case of food, and steak-and-kidney pudding followed sausages and vegetables just as quickly as we could heat and open the tins. Biscuits, chocolate and other delicacies came next and by-the-time lunch was over it was time for tea.

Alan and Frank had a wash at Howitt Plains—sheer vanity on their part, for we were still a week from the closest neighbour!

Across the Howitt Plains were two feet and more of snow, coupled occasionally with a heartbreaking crusted surface. A crusted surface may be popular with skiers, but remember that we were walking—or, rather, getting along with a gait which we named the foreign legion shuffle).

We preferred walking to skiing for two excellent reasons: None of us can ski and throughout the journey of 150 miles only 35 miles were suitable for skiing.

We came upon several small pools of water and our combined efforts were required to crack the thick crust of ice. A little further along, an old snow gum

(free of snow) stretched to St Bernard. Mt Howitt, Mt Speculation and the Crosscut Saw seemed closer than anything we had seen, a jagged alpine aspect.

On the final slopes of Howitt the conditions were icy and we walked over the frozen crust, kicking steps where necessary. We were within 100 yards of our goal when out of a seemingly cloudless sky a driving mist blotted out the summit and distant views. Conditions deteriorated rapidly and after visiting the cairn we raced back to the partial shelter of Macalister Springs. The weather had broken! It was the beginning of a blizzard which might rage for weeks without abating.

We pitched our equipment tent and our sleeping tent and after making everything as secure as possible we crawled into our treble-layer sleeping-bags. Throughout the night the wind increased in fury and by next morning a foot of fresh snow covered the old level.

Driving snow from all sides tested our little tent to the utmost and during the day water began to seep through the floor. We cooked our food on one of the two petrol stoves we were carrying for such an

Frank Schroder and Harry Stephenson in 1986, 50 years after their epic walk. Near right, lunch at Macalister Springs on the site of our camp during the 40-hour blizzard. Far right, sledging on Gable End, Mt Wellington; Alan Wilson (note his substantial pair of 'Shebas'), left, and Stephenson. Frank Schroder

inaction we slept little during the night and at five o'clock in the morning the weight of the snow on the tent snapped the guy. It was too dark to move so we waited for two hours before digging our way out to the surface.

During the 36 hours, two feet of snow had fallen and only the apex of our tiny equipment tent was visible. There was no thought of breakfast as we set about salvaging our gear and packing up in the dawn light.

It was impossible to remain at the springs; it was also difficult to leave. Our only way out lay over the very summit of Mt Howitt and thence down to the shelter of the Howqua valley. Those who are

familiar with the country will understand our struggle to safety more by the time we took than by any description I might attempt.

The half-mile from Macalister Springs to the summit of Mt Howitt took us an hour-and-a-half and another hour was spent getting down through the soft snow to the Howqua River, which we reached two miles above the usual first crossing.

The visibility was only five or six feet and every step, waist-deep in snow, was checked by compass. To find our way off Howitt we knew we must find the rock-cairn, and we were fortunate to strike it without trouble. The wind was on our left and was so strong that at times we were blown over. Our wind- and snow-proof clothing stood up to the test remarkably well and the only casualty was slight frostbite sustained by Frank when he removed a glove for a moment.

Arriving at the Howqua at noon, we immediately camped in order to 'dry off'; whereupon it began to rain!

We erected a rough shelter from our six groundsheets and long into the night we sat eating, and drying clothes and sleeping-bags.

The next day we started down the flooded Howqua, which roared along at an alarming rate. Each crossing was dangerous, for in such a current it was impossible to

ash had crashed and lay splintered across our track and we saw probably 50 such forest giants which had been brought to the ground.

'Sixteen Mile' and safety was reached the next morning and for the first time in days the sun broke through. The Mining Track along the south bank of the river was followed beyond 'Eight Mile' to our last camp. From the track we saw the summits of Mt Stirling and the Bluff. Snow-capped, they presented a majestic spectacle as they

were the first people we had seen since saying *au revoir* to Jack Wilson at Upper Maffra West. 'Do you know a chap by the name of Albert Aird?' they asked. Did we? He had almost made a fourth member of our little party. They had met him on his solo trip through this area the previous February.

That afternoon we crossed the suspension bridge and walked the ten miles into Merrigig. Our winter trip completed, we returned to Melbourne with a host of memories and sufficient photographs to retain for all time pleasant recollections of a



stand in water above knee-depth. At the crossing above 'Sixteen Mile' Frank was swept over but fortunately he made a quick recovery. We immediately camped (after a day's tally of less than five miles) in order to dry my gear.

Along the Howqua was much evidence of the violent storm which was still raging on the mountains above. Huge mountain

towers above us, one on either side of the valley.

From our last camp it was only three miles to Frys. We passed the old mining battery and chimney and had a last glimpse of the snow country. Little Buller and Mt Buller from close at hand nodded to us as we approached the old suspension bridge. We lunched at Frys with three miners. They

wonderful fortnight spent in one of the most isolated sections of Victoria's mountain fastness. ☺

The stars are bright on Wellington.
I sit within my city walls,
And, dreaming, hear a voice that calls,
That calls me back to Wellington.

RH Croll

1 pound = 0.45 kilograms
1 mile = 1.6 kilometres
1 foot = 30 centimetres
1 yard = 90 centimetres
1 inch = 2.5 centimetres

The best maps to use when following this route are the Heyfield, Ben Cruachan, Bular South and Bular North 1:25 000 Vicmap sheets combined with the Loddon-Wellington, Tumbarumba-Moroko and Howitt-Selkyn 1:50 000 Vicmap sheets. Alternatively, the alpine section of the walk is covered by the Snowy Plains, Mt Kent and Lake Tali Kang and King, Howqua and Jamieson Rivers 1:50 000 Victorian Mountain Tramping Club maps by Stuart Brooks.

Harry Stephenson (see Contributors in Wild no 16) began bushwalking in 1928 and was still undertaking significant walking adventures in the Himalayas in the early 1990s. He wrote and published a number of important books with an Australian bush theme including *Cattlemen and Huts of the High Plains* and *Skiing the High Plains*. He died last May.

eylandt

Walking Australia's third-largest



land; by Peter Evans

Groote Eylandt lies south-east from Gove in the Gulf of Carpentaria and at around 70 kilometres long and 50 kilometres wide it is Australia's third-largest island (discounting good ol' Tassie). There is a mine (run by BHP) on the western side and there are three, small Aboriginal communities but apart from this the island is basically wilderness; the entire eastern side has neither settlements nor roads. The island is part of Arnhem Land and is Aboriginal owned, with its own land council. Apart from Aborigines the only people allowed on Groote are those working at the mine, or public servants such as teachers or health professionals employed to service the communities. The land council is fairly strict in monitoring recreational activities on Groote by the non-Aboriginal residents. Permits are required to enter lands away from the communities and some areas of the island are permanently closed or off limits to people not closely associated with the clan that owns the land.

During 1994-95 I was fortunate enough to explore Groote Eylandt by foot, vehicle and boat and to photograph it comprehensively as I had developed a close relationship with the Aboriginal owners and gained access to places either off limits or unknown to most Europeans who lived there. One area, however, had eluded me due to its sacred status—the region around the highest point on Groote, Central Hill in the interior of the island. On the map it is shown as a large mass of undulating scrub punctuated with huge, sandstone hills and surrounded by canyons. The region is sacred because it holds a powerful place in the island's dreaming stories and in the history of the Aborigines' migration to Groote from the mainland hundreds of years ago. Six weeks before I was due to leave Groote for good the elder concerned with this region gave me and my friend André permission to enter selected areas. We sat with a map and he drew lines of delineation marking a route that was allowed. Although we were not to climb Central Hill we had a fairly open ticket to explore its tantalising surroundings.

November—at the end of the dry season—was not a good time to walk. Water would be a real problem, with eight litres each a day the minimum and reserves needed. As this would be too heavy to carry, we consulted Jambala, a man who had known the area since childhood and he explained where we could find a permanent soak. So without further ado we packed, got a lift up the track and were dropped off at the point where we were to begin our journey. When the dust had cleared we

stepped off the road and into the first stand of pandanry.

From the road to the edge of the escarpment the country consisted of undulating scrub snaked by the occasional dry creek-bed—very featureless terrain so it was necessary to use a compass. The vegetation here consists of stringy eucalypts and is so uniform that once out of sight of the road it is easy to get lost on an overcast day.

metres it doesn't sound high but from sea level in pancake-flat terrain it's certainly something to trip over. We were still several kilometres away but the sight reassured us that our navigational skills were in order. We continued until the low scrub gave way to a massive sandstone rock-face, torn and twisted from years of erosion. We had scarcely entered this area when we came across rock art, occasional figures and hand



André set a bearing to the base of Central Hill and we headed off with the usual adjusting of packs and burning calf muscles, the dry ground crunching under our boots as we kept an eye out for the odd Joe Blake. The temperature was rising toward 30°C so we took regular breaks, munching on muesli bars and drinking plenty of water. Birds and lizards were plentiful and although the creek-beds were dry, judging by the assortment of footprints they were still visited by many animals. Several trips out bush with the locals had taught me to recognise dingo, quoll, goanna, wallaby, snake and—along the coast—crocodile and turtle; the incredible variety of wildlife this island has to offer. Standing in the dry creek-bed and looking at the harsh, dry bush it was easy to see why the Aborigines lived along the coastline with its fresh fish, turtle, dugong, crocodile and shellfish—a strong contrast to wallaby and lizards which are hard to catch. The locals—like the dwellers of the Tanami Desert on the mainland—have skills to survive in the interior of Groote but these skills were needed only occasionally when crossing from coast to coast.

Just before midday we ascended a small hill and got our first glimpse of Central Hill and the surrounding escarpment. At 180

Aboriginal paintings near Central Hill, Groote Eylandt. Left, the author meets the local termites in the same area. All photos Peter Evans collection

prints plastered about the overhanging rocks and crevices. André was getting excited—he usually does when finding new galleries—and pointed to things we hadn't seen before. Although it was only early afternoon we decided to look for a campsite to put down our packs and explore the surroundings. Several agile wallabies bounded about keeping a respectable distance but curious none the less, looking at the two strange creatures with bright-blue humps on their backs stumbling without much coordination across the rocks. A large, flat rock edged by two round boulders made a fine camp, so we started the ritual of setting up.

I like to get to a camp-site early, set up camp and then spend the next few hours relaxing or exploring. I think back to my early days of walking with amazement—my friends and I would walk all day and then, in chaos, try to set up tents, light a fire and cook dinner in the five minutes that remained before dark. Needless to say our tents usually collapsed during the night (we

groote eylandt— some basic facts

- Groote Eylandt was named by Abel Jansoon Tasman in 1644. The name means large island'.
- Central Hill (180 metres) was imaginatively named by Matthew Flinders, who first circumnavigated the island in 1803.
- The island is considered part of the broader Aboriginal lands of Amhem Land. A mission run by the Church Missionary Society was begun at Emerald River in the 1930s. The CMS mission is now named An-gurugu.
- The island has a BHP-run manganese mine on its western side. The major township is named Alyangula and has approximately 800 residents. It is serviced by Ansett as a stopover from Cairns to Darwin.

Further reading

- *Fred Gray of Umbakumba* by Keith Cole (published by the author, 1984, Bendigo).
- *Return to Eden* by David Turner (Peter Lang, 1989, New York).

had those cheap Kmart jobs) and we always had some hard thing sticking into our backs from under the tent floor. I looked over at André's pad; sleeping bag all fluffed up and a light, cotton mozzie-net strung over it by a few twigs. The man definitely has style. I had brought my Eureka tent minus the fly, an excellent set-up because without the fly it is mainly screen and you can lie at night looking at the stars and catch the breeze, but with its streamlined shape and aggressive colours it looks like a spaceship that has just landed.

After a quick cuppa we headed up some fairly steep rock slopes to the top of the escarpment. From here we had a spectacular view—in one direction to Central Hill and in another, to the coast. The escarpment country extended for kilometres around us, an immense maze of cliffs and canyons. Virtually all this country from Central Hill to the coast is believed to be unexplored by Europeans. It is extremely sacred ground and contains the burial sites of hundreds of Groote Eylandt ancestors. Few non-Aborigines have climbed the hill; they were mostly missionaries. In fact a missionary was killed on Central Hill when his firearm accidentally discharged, or so the story goes. His grave lies somewhere on the hill. When Aborigines climb Central Hill they never speak and they clean their ears out with a twig beforehand so that they can hear the soft voices of their spirit ancestors talking. André and I were content just to sit

and admire the fine view; tomorrow we would explore what was permissible. Back at camp we ate a nice, hot meal before an early sleep that was cut short by marauding quolls ransacking our tucker.

The following morning was cool and crisp. As dawn radiated liquid gold we had breakfast and packed up camp, leaving it as we had discovered it—natural. From

to Darwin businessmen with Japanese crews. Apparently the relationship between the Macassans and the Aborigines was friendly and quite a few Indonesian words are in the local Anindilyakwa language; clans such as Bara and Mamarika are named after the north-west and south-east trade winds on which the Macassans came and left. They also showed the Aborigines how to make the dug-out canoes they brought with them, and they planted tamarinds along the coastline to mark

where they had camped and collected trepang. The Aborigines on Groote and surrounding islands must have been fascinated by the huge ships as some galleries depict them almost exclusively.

A little further on the escarpment began to break up into isolated stands of boulders and tall, shady gums. We unexpectedly found a waterhole which was a hive of activity; huge, red dragonflies hovering overhead and the odd kingfisher zooming by at water-level. We had lunch, topped up our water-bottles and headed towards the next campsite. The cliffs regrouped and eventually fused again into a solid wall with occasional deep canyons. This area is particularly steep, impassable in many spots, and trees grow out of caverns in the rock so that at ground level you stand halfway up their trunks. Some places are as thick with vegetation as a rainforest. We speculated that deep below the rocks must lie permanent water, perhaps even an underground stream. André and I clambered down to the base of the escarpment and set up camp again. Immersed in this beautiful landscape we wandered off in separate directions to bathe in glorious solitude for a while—the only people in the universe. At dusk we cooked a hearty meal and settled down with a healthy fire which radiated a beautiful, soft glow, lighting the edges of the cliffs and surrounding boulders. Shadows danced like primeval beings holding sacred ceremonies and sparks trailed yellow fire into the starry night. My feeling of relaxation was complete. André was smiling contentedly to himself over his bilby tea; gone was the tension engendered by his work. The following day we'd have a reasonable walk and our main task while exploring was to find Jambala's waterhole. Even though we had unexpectedly topped up at lunchtime the walk tomorrow would be through extremely dry country and we didn't want to take chances in case of accident or snake bite, which might delay us for a considerable time. Jambala had followed our route on the map and pointed to an area at the base of some cliffs where a permanent billabong could be found. We trusted him, but his fingertip on the map



Jambala's waterhole, Central Hill area. Right, Aboriginal rock art.

there we descended to the base of the escarpment and explored for rock-art galleries. Nearly every overhang in the wall was decorated, some cluttered with hundreds of years of work, hand prints and scenes depicting hunting parties on the coast. The hand prints are especially interesting as they are the first signs of a gallery as you approach and can be seen a long way off from the entrance. I have seen a rock-face from a distance of about 50 metres and, despite colourful geographic features, easily made out hand prints. Among the clutter of hunting figures were paintings of huge *perahus* from Indonesia. These ships belonged to the Macassans from Sulawesi who used to collect trepang long before the Europeans arrived. When Europeans finally settled Darwin they drove the Macassans out and gave the lucrative trepang market

represented about 500 metres of dense, pandann scrub.

When I awoke in the morning André was already rummaging through his pack and the billy was simmering. We consulted the map and decided to change our route slightly. Instead of skirting the base of the cliff at the edge of the scrub as intended, we would try to find a way up and over the first line of cliffs and deep into the next gorge as the area looked interesting and according to the map we could follow this way for a distance and come out roughly near Jambala's waterhole. So we finished breakfast, packed up camp and headed for the cliffs. We soon found a cave which looked promising for rock art. It arched perhaps ten metres above us and the floor

and several times we feared that we would have to turn back. The heat was beginning to suck the moisture from our skin and we began to worry about the waterhole. However, we found it quite easily as it was the only patch of green in a scorched scrub blackened by fire and sucked dry by the rainless mid-year seasons. With bottles freshly filled and clothes soaked through we headed away from the cliffs and into featureless scrub littered with enormous termite mounds. The compass was essential again and André wielded it with all the expertise of an army veteran. The road was about 11 kilometres from here and we expected to intersect another line of cliffs which are part of a separate mass of rock halfway along.



was covered in fine, red, ochre dust fallen from the ceiling. Not a footprint anywhere. This cave was lined with paintings of hunting parties and animals. As we followed the face along, there were more caves of similar size covered in art and together these represented a very significant gallery. Many of the rituals and beings depicted were similar to those in previous galleries but there was an absence of boats and fish. These new artworks depicted kangaroos and strange dot clusters I had never seen before.

We moved on looking for a place to climb into the next gorge but the walls were too steep to tackle without climbing rope. At the mouth of a crevice André dropped his pack and went in for a look. Minutes later a 'Whoopee' came echoing back; the crevice opened into a cave which led through into the next gorge. The rest of the morning was spent following this. It was spectacular to say the least—rugged walls extending 30 metres vertically and punctuated with the odd gum or pandann perfectly outlined against the clear, azure-blue sky.

It was difficult going with regular obstacles like rock-faces or tangled vegetation

The scrub thickened as we crossed a series of creek-beds which didn't correspond to what was on the map. They and the undulating terrain seemed to slope away in a direction that suggested we were on the other side of a catchment area from where we had expected to be so we found a shady tree and rested briefly. In featureless terrain you judge distance by time walked averaged out; for example, one kilometre every eight minutes. It can be a very accurate way of calculating time/distance to the next known land-form. With that in mind we decided to blame this little confusion on the lack of detail on the map and worry later if the cliffs towards which we were heading didn't materialise around the expected time. So we set off again after taking a bearing.

As time went on we became increasingly worried and uncertain—landforms just didn't correspond to what was on the map. Was that last rock-face really the one on the map or were we a few kilometres west of it? We traced our route back to Jambala's waterhole and looked again—slightly along the route past Jambala's waterhole we

passed through some very broken rock formations which were spread out; it was easy to see that we could have mistaken one for another so we could now be up to five kilometres off course. It wasn't a serious matter because if we continued the way we were going we would eventually reach the road somewhere. We continued on and about midday, much to our relief, we intersected the cliffs. By the evening we should meet the track again—and our lift home. This section of cliffs differed from previous ones as there were no galleries despite an abundance of caves. However, it was extremely dry and fires had ravaged the surrounding areas. We found a nice, overhanging rock and settled down for a few hours out of the midday heat. The coolness of the afternoon breeze was the signal for our departure on the final leg back to the road.

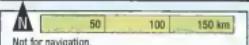
About halfway we crossed some massive swamp we believed to be dry but the grass was over our heads and we had to skirt round it. It was late afternoon when we came to the road. After three days of witnessing only nature's creative hand the road seemed like a grotesque slash through the silent bush. Our lift arrived and we climbed aboard into a blizzard of air-conditioning and rock music which I would normally have welcomed but at that moment I was overcome by the fearful realisation that this and wilderness are mutually exclusive. Would someone one day build a road along where we had hiked so that people could see the rock art and the marvellous country from the seats of air-conditioned buses? My heart goes out to the

Tarkine and other such areas and I pray that the wilderness of Groote Eylandt escapes the fate of so much that has been lost these past 200 years. ☺

Directions, distances and other navigational details in this article have deliberately been obscured to protect the sacredness of the areas described.

Peter Evans is a social worker who lived on Groote Eylandt for two years working with the Aboriginal Land Council, liaising with the mining company and assisting young Aborigines to find work. He is a keen bushwalker and photographer (he has recently fallen in love with underwater photography) who has travelled through such places as central Australia, Nepal, India, Thailand and Indonesia. He strongly believes in the conservation of wilderness and is disturbed by how little is left.

northern australia



A RAPID RECOVERY

David Clark describes how a pleasant paddle resulted in a near drowning

I thought it would never happen. I'd been paddling white-water rivers for more than 15 years and had never been in a serious situation. Sure, I'd seen some near misses; a few times things could have gone badly. But a couple of bruises, a lost paddle and an exaggerated epic in the pub afterwards were the worst I had experienced—or expected. All the indications were that today would not be different; the sun was shining, the river was up, and the paddlers were keen and ready.

The six of us—Alison, Jenny, Walter, John, Trevor, and I—had decided to paddle the Cobungra River from Anglers Rest, near Omeo in Victoria's High Country, to its confluence with the Mitta Mitta River. None of us had paddled the river (a technical river of grade IV standard) before and we thought that it would make an interesting prelude to the principal objective of the trip, the Mitta Mitta Gorge (grade III). Little did we realise how interesting it would turn out to be.

We get on to the river behind the Blue Duck Cabins in Anglers Rest and drift with the current, offering lazy strokes to avoid the occasional tree. For 30 minutes we leisurely bob along. I am beginning to doubt that there are any rapids on the river when the first horizon line springs into view, accompanied by the familiar roar of water losing height. With keen anticipation I paddle forward to the lip of the fall, craning my neck to try to see a suitable path through the turbulent water below.

I enjoy paddling rivers I've not done before, not knowing what treasures they may hold: towering red cliffs, a remote valley awash with wattles, lizards basking on water-carved rock sculptures, or a glimpse of a platypus, momentarily surprised by my intrusion into its world. When approaching rapids on such rivers I usually feel apprehensive, unsure of what danger—or fun—may await below, but always eager to find out. The adrenalin starts pumping, extraneous thoughts are put aside; it's time to concentrate on the task in hand.

The sight of a branch in the main flow is enough to warrant a proper bank inspection. I always get more nervous looking at a rapid when I stand on the bank than from my boat. My mind has more time to exaggerate the worst scenarios and suppress



the possibility of a successful descent. The paddlers' adage that 'the time spent looking at a hole is proportional to the time you'll spend getting trashed in it' has a proven record. I usually find it less worrying to run it without delay; however, when the route down cannot be seen from the water it's important to make sure that there is no hazard, as for example a submerged log, which can't be avoided.

We all inspect the rapid and make it down without serious mishap.

The valley becomes steeper, sheer faced in parts, as the river carves a turbulent path through the rock to the Mitta Mitta River, now less than a kilometre away. The route down is through a series of twisting channels between rocks and large boulders littering the riverbed. Numerous eddies allow plenty of opportunities to pick the route by zigzagging from one to the next. Another well-defined horizon line looms; time to have a closer look. I paddle over a small drop into a pool formed behind a huge boulder in the middle of the river and wait for the others to join me. So far the group has been paddling well but I'm sure that there will be harder drops ahead which may require portaging.

Alison joins me in the eddy. We look upstream and see Jenny capsize on the easy rapid just above the little drop in front of

This photo of a river-rescue exercise makes it look real enough! John Wilde. Right, David Clark on the Cobungra River less than a kilometre downstream from the scene of the rescue. Clark collection

us. We laugh as she bails out and watch as her boat floats over the fall which is about a metre high. I wait for her to surface in the pool below the drop—but something seems wrong. Alison's cry startles me; then I notice Jenny trapped in the fall. She is sitting upright and facing downstream. The water is pushing on her back and shoulders and surging over the top of her helmet. I can't see her face! It takes me a few more seconds to grasp the seriousness of the situation; Jenny isn't being washed through. She is drowning!

I don't know what to do. Why doesn't she free herself? How can she be stuck in such a small, insignificant drop? I paddle up to her and she grabs the front of my boat but can't pull herself free. I must do something. I rip my spray-deck off and jump into the river. Alison, still in her boat, helps me into a small eddy behind the large boulder. I climb up some rocks at the side of the drop and grab hold of Jenny's buoyancy aid. She is wedged fast. Keeping my hands on her shoulders I climb into the fall behind her, hoping that I don't get trapped too.

The current pushes my legs hard against Jenny's back, preventing me from being immediately swept downstream. The power of such a small volume of water is frightening. I move my feet around, trying to avoid standing on Jenny's legs which are crumpled beneath and behind her; I can't feel anything under the water to cause her entrapment. I get a stable footing on the rocks and, with her shoulders now level with my waist, grab hold of her buoyancy aid and heave with all my might. She doesn't move!

Jenny is calm and keeps raising her hand out of the water, one finger pointing skywards. What does this mean? Can she breathe in an air pocket formed in front of her face? Is she holding her breath? I wish she could tell me. I pull again, lose my footing, and cartwheel over Jenny into the pool below. Alison helps me into the eddy and I have another go. John appears on the bank; he knows it's serious. I climb in behind Jenny, then John throws me a rope and I clip it on to Jenny's buoyancy aid. John runs upstream and pulls on the rope

cobungra river



while I try to lift Jenny in the fall. She still doesn't move. Again, I'm swept away and swim back for another go. Walter and Trevor have now joined John in pulling on the rope but it isn't working. How can she still be stuck? Time is running out; it seems like hours since she became trapped though it can only be a couple of minutes.

I'm exhausted now. Why doesn't someone do something? I climb on to the large boulder and look down on the scene. This doesn't help; I can't see anything else we can do that we aren't doing already. I'm upset; resigned to the fact that she will drown, while I watch unable to do anything about it. I have already given up. I look down again and notice that Jenny's body is

now slumped forward, her limp form swaying beneath the water. She's gone!

I'm desperate and distraught. Convinced that I'm now going to pull out a corpse I swim back to the fall. Filled with anger and frustration I give an enormous heave and she lifts slightly. 'Give me slack,' I yell to the others holding the rope as I throw her forward out of the drop and tumble into the pool after her. She is floating motionless, face down. I turn her over and see a white, bloated face with wide, staring eyes and deep-blue lips. 'Too late,' I cry, 'she's dead!'

John jumps into the water and starts mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while we swim her body to shore. I am too drained to do anything; John takes over. Walter and Trevor help us to drag Jenny on to the bank where John checks for a pulse and doesn't find one. She's cold and clammy. She has been in the water for a long time. Quickly removing her helmet and buoyancy aid, John starts cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. I stand watching numb; praying for a miracle. A couple of minutes pass and still there is no sign of life. Walter assists John with the CPR. I feel ashamed that I'm not helping but I can't remember what to do; it's been too many years since my last first aid course. The minutes tick by and hope fades. Suddenly there's a cough, and Jenny vomits and starts to breathe. I can't believe it! She's alive!

The despondency and gloom lift; there is now a sense of urgency. Jenny is in a critical condition and could relapse at any moment. John seems to know what he's doing. Someone needs to go for help; I no longer feel tired. Trevor and I set off, climbing out of the gorge and running through the forest, following the vague directions John has given. They prove to be right, as we hit the Omeo Highway less than 30 minutes after setting off. On reaching Anglers Rest we contact the emergency services. Help is on the way but we're certainly not out of the woods yet.

Trevor and I return to the river, where Jenny is now thrashing around—a handful for Alison who is trying to stop her from hurting herself. Dr Noel Atherstone and an ambulance officer appear on the far bank a few hours later, and we ferry them across the river. With the assistance of the Blue Duck Cabin owners, who helped the medics into the gorge, we haul the medical equipment across and above the river using throw-ropes.

After a quick examination the doctor informs us that Jenny isn't brain damaged. The relief is overwhelming. Until now I had doubt that we had done the right thing in reviving her. Of course, it was our only choice, but the nagging thought that she'd be a vegetable had persisted. I hadn't been alone in thinking this, but now a new

sense of optimism prevails. She's going to be all right. Everyone is wearing a grin; we've succeeded against all odds. Jenny seems unfazed by this quiet celebration; she is still unable to speak, coordinate her movements or even recognise me.

We start to clear a path up the side of the gorge and as it would be very difficult to carry a stretcher up the steep, rugged terrain, we are relieved to hear a helicopter overhead. Within half an hour Jenny has been winched out of the gorge and is on her way to the Sale Hospital intensive care unit. She is now out of our hands. The ordeal is over.

Jenny suffered from hypoxia (oxygen starvation of the brain) after her revival. During the course of the day she gradually regained consciousness, passing through the following well-documented recovery stages: just breathing and motionless; extending the body (pushing and stretching limbs outwards); contracting the body (pulling limbs in towards the body); regaining mobility (thrashing around and trying to sit up, moaning); sitting up and vomiting; responding to speech; becoming coherent (able to speak). The last stage wasn't reached until she was in hospital. What some of us had feared was brain damage was actually part of the body's recovery process.

An important lesson from the incident was never to give up trying to rescue or revive a drowning victim. Immersion in cold water can slow the heart rate and body functions until they are barely discernible, concentrating circulation between the brain and heart, thereby allowing the victim to survive without breathing for a much longer period than you'd think possible. This mechanism may have contributed to Lenny's survival.

Jenny made a full recovery in hospital but still cannot remember the day's events, which is probably a good thing. The group, including Jenny, still paddle regularly. I have relearned my CPR technique! ☺

David Clark is a pom and has been canoeing for more than 15 years, paddling some of the best white water in the UK, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. When not canoeing he indulges in mountaineering, rockclimbing, skiing, bushwalking and caving. A structural engineer, he lives in Melbourne and drives a Kingswood.



The far country

Australia's furthest reaches, by Robyn Stewart



Robyn Stewart is an Adelaide-based freelance photographer who has travelled extensively through the remote regions of Australia, China and Africa seeking to capture the power and serenity of the undisturbed natural environment.



Top right, Bonaparte Archipelago, Western Australia. Right, Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. Far right, near Old Andado Station, south-west Queensland.

Look Ma! No Hands!



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'What a drag it is
getting old'
(Old man, Angkor Wat,
north-west Cambodia.)
Greg Tossal

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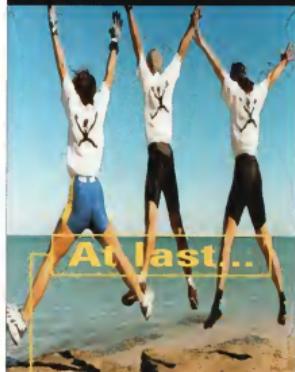
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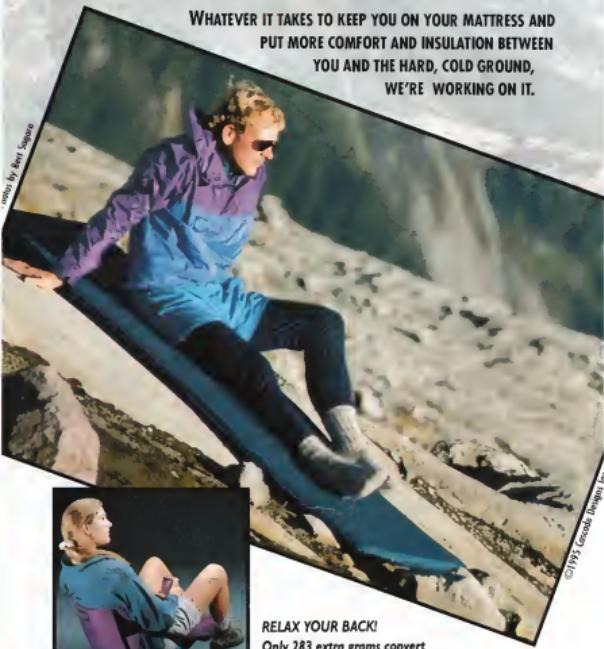
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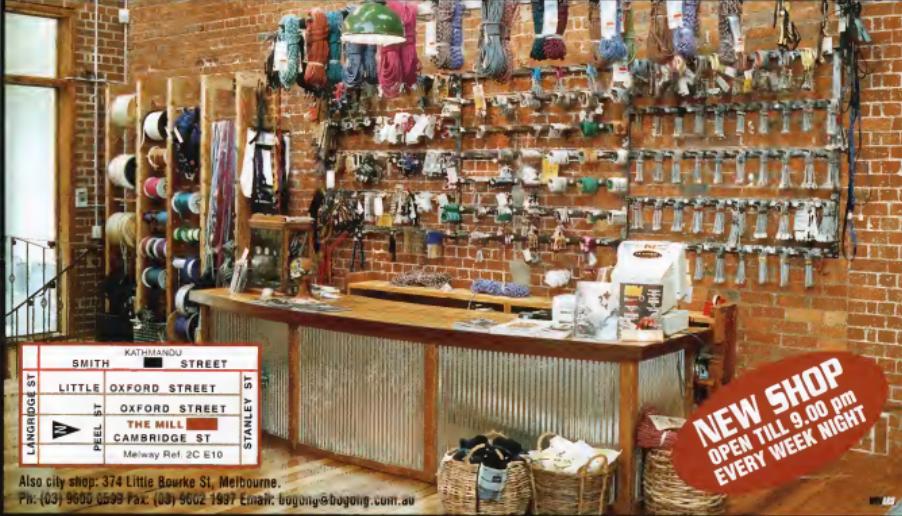
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Blue Gum

Major new New South Wales walking history

BOOKS

● **Back From the Brink: Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness**

by Andy Macqueen (published by the author, 1997, RRP \$29.95).

This is a major new book from this well-known bushwalking historian. It provides a very comprehensive history of one of the oldest and most significant bushwalking areas near Sydney. An important theme is the story of the Blue Gum Forest—that icon for bushwalkers which can rightly be regarded as the cradle for wilderness conservation in New South Wales. (See the article beginning on page 46 of this issue of *Wild*.) The rest of the Grose catchment is also described in loving detail.

The largest sections contain stories of the early bushwalkers. The accounts taken from journals of the time of Eccleston Du Faur's expedition into Blue Gum accompanied by artists and photographers stand out.

The author has been bushwalking in the Grose area since the 1960s. However, it is obvious from the depth of material presented here that he has recently undertaken a major programme of Grose bushwalks in order to verify matters discussed in this book. The locations and present conditions of old tracks, passes, mines and other structures have all been carefully checked.

Excellent material has been provided on the early trips by canyoneers and climbers. Most moving is the harrowing account given by one of the survivors of a party caught by a flash flood in Claustal Canyon in 1982. Three of the party died.

The last section of this book contains a careful account of the campaign to save Blue Gum Forest in which the author honestly discusses all the issues. The final chapter is the emotive story of the life of one of the central characters of the battle, WJ (Jim) Cleary.

Scattered generously throughout the more than 300 pages of the book are many fine black-and-white images. Old maps and historic photographs as well as a series of Macqueen's own, admirable, black-and-white photos complement the text. The

author has gone out of his way to use the same location for his cover picture as one the earliest surveyors, Mitchell, whose sketch forms the frontispiece.

The author should be complimented for his painstaking and thorough research. This important book is highly recommended.

David Noble

● **Bushwalking in Australia**

by John and Monica Chapman (Lonely Planet, third edition 1997, RRP \$24.95).

The authors of this attractive guide need no introduction to the readers of *Wild*. Although principally designed as a guidebook for foreign visitors to Australia who want

to get further into the bush than the average tourist, it will also be useful to local walkers who want to investigate some walking outside their home State.

The format is small—easy to squeeze into a pack—but has a wealth of information crammed into its 353 pages. It features full descriptions of 35 walks, of which 11 have been added since the previous edition.

The choice of walks seems to be good and takes in a wide variety of landscapes and vegetation areas. Many of the walks are accessible by public transport. The descriptions for each walk seem quite comprehensive and the accompanying maps are clear and well drawn. Suggestions for further walks are added at the end of each State chapter. A feature I like are the little boxes that appear from time to time. They add local flavour to each State or walk; for example, the notes about Peter Dombrovskis and Paddy Pallin.

There are black-and-white as well as colour photographs. The latter are very attractive but may cause some confusion since some are grouped with those from another State.

The guide contains the excellent advice for foreign visitors on such matters as weights and measures and time zones that we have come to expect from Lonely

Planet guides in general, and it is good to see that the unique Australian flora and fauna have not been neglected. The expanded bird section, with many sketches, is particularly commendable.

DN

● **Blue Rivers: A narrative of time in the Blue Mountains**

by Ross Brownscombe (Forever Wild Press, 1997, RRP \$16.95).

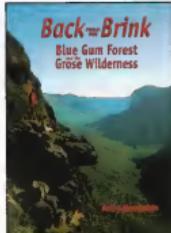
The most renowned features of the Blue Mountains are the imposing escarpments and deep, forested valleys. As the author of this passionate and often lyrical book declares in his prologue, the intricate world that lies beyond—or, more accurately, below—is rarely considered.

Blue Rivers recounts the author's experiences as he rafts alone down five of the wildest waterways in the Blue Mountains. Although there is some repetition in the way each of these river journeys unfolds, the encounters with these secluded sandstone ravines are told with great immediacy. The book ripples with striking and memorable descriptions of pools and gurgling rapids, bird life, approaching storms and the jumbles of rock and tangled casuarinas.

But there is much more to this book than a bright surface. Since Heraclitus—and probably before—rivers have been a source of philosophical intuition and metaphor. And at the heart of this narrative lie conversations between the author and the landscape he passes through; its origins, its history of European exploration and the essential meaning of wilderness.

As perhaps befits a book about rafting, it's not all smooth going and Brownscombe is not above making a few bumpy observations either. Tourists are 'lazy and careless', Myles Dunphy cops a caning for his 'foolish' naming of landscape features while nameless developers, bureaucrats and shire councillors loom as potential destroyers.

A lot of this is calculated provocation. But there are odd moments of contradiction. It is not until the final section of the book, for instance, that the Aboriginal





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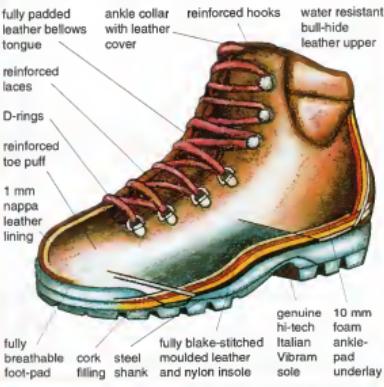
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made *Francis Barker*. This extraordinary prismatic compass is handcrafted (not handmade, of course!) from solid, polished brass and retails for a paltry \$595. Available by mail order from the Orienteering Service of Australia; phone (03) 9489 9884.

• Alliance Foods update

Following the closure of the freeze-dried food division of New Zealand-based *Alliance* (see Equipment, Wild no 66), *Wild* has been informed by Outdoor Agencies (the Australian distributor) that stock of all varieties of *Back Country Cuisine* is available from outdoors shops during December and January. It is expected that most of this stock will be sold out by February 1998. Australian-made *Adventure Foods* freeze-dried products will be available in its place—watch this space. ☺

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near this big
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This department describes new products which the editorial staff consider will be of interest to readers. The tests they apply for inclusion are whether a product is useful for the rucksack sports, and whether it is fundamentally new (or newly available in Australia). The reports are based on information provided by the manufacturer/distributor. As is the case with all editorial text appearing in *Wild*, publication of material in this department is *in no way connected with advertising*. Submissions for possible publication are accepted from advertisers and from businesses not advertising in *Wild*, as well as from our readers. (See also the footnote at the end of this department.)

Products (on loan to *Wild*) and/or information about them, including colour slides, are welcome for possible review in this department. Written items should be typed, include recommended retail prices and preferably not exceed 200 words. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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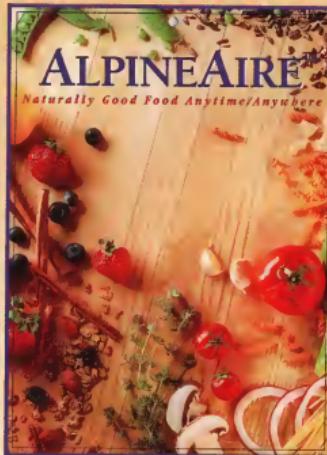
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Vanish with the *Vamoose child carrier*. From *Macpac*. Made with AzTec SL material, it features a 15 litre zip-off day pack (the child carrier has a total capacity of 35 litres), and weighs about two kilograms. Two travel packs are also new—the *Utopia* and the *Java*. RRP \$369, \$679 and \$299, respectively.

TENTS

A celestial event

Macpac has continued to modify and extend its range of tents with two new models. Aficionados of the lightweight Eclipse tent (single pole, two-person capacity) may be interested to know that this 'old' design has been upgraded and given a new name. Now with an extra vestibule and an extended fly, the sacrifice—at a glance—is an extra 100 grams in weight (total weight 2.6 kilograms). The name of this new celestial creature? The *Lunar*...naturally.

Macpac's other new tent, the *Vault*, is aptly named—it's huge (4.3 kilograms in weight). With a floor area of 4.4 square metres, you could happily park an elephant in the *Vault's* large vestibule (there's a smaller vestibule, too). RRP \$589 and \$799, respectively.

SLEEPING-BAGS

New jewel

Macpac's new *Sapphire XPD* down sleeping bag (with a shell made of Reflex HiLight material) appears to offer exceptional warmth with a claimed 1100 gram fill. The *Sapphire XPD* weighs 1.8 kilograms and costs RRP \$749.

CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

Home-grown

The sleek-looking *Eclipse boot* is the latest offering from South Australian manufacturer *Rossi*. On inspecting a pair at the *Wild* offices, the full-grain leather *Eclipse* seemed to be well constructed and torsionally sturdy. With a Vibram sole, full-length bellows and a padded tongue and heel, the Cambrelle-lined *Eclipse* retails for about \$190; it is said to be a genuine alternative to the highly priced, imported styles. Indeed, it appears to take a most promising step.

Speaking of steps in the right direction, another long-established Australian boot manufacturer—*Blundstone*—is on the come-back trail as far as bushwalkers are concerned. Although famous for its walking boots in previous decades, *Blundstone* has apparently ignored that market until the recent appearance of its unadventurous named *Style 208* leather bushwalking boot. At an RRP of about \$120, the 208 is very attractively priced and has a number of

features normally associated with far more expensive, European-style boots. In particular, it appears to be both comfortable and effective in absorbing shock when used on hard surfaces.

MISCELLANEOUS

Call for help

Wild recently received two EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon) units. The *KTI mini sat-alert* (215 grams) and the *MT310* (175 grams) are both designed to be used in the bush, in the air or at sea to notify relevant rescue authorities (by satellite link) of the user's position in an emergency. Both units are Australian made and come with a five-year 'parts and labour' warranty. Each unit retails for \$299. The mini sat-alert (pictured) is

Above, Rossi Eclipse boots. Above right, KTI mini sat-alert emergency beacon. Right, Blundstone's Style 208 boots.

TRIX

How not to get lost

Some basic techniques, by *Will Steffen*

Getting lost is one of the outdoors experiences no bushwalker seeks, or even likes to admit to. Not only is it embarrassing, it also causes unnecessary worry, consumes hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in search and rescue operations and can be threatening in serious cases.

Before you turn to high-tech solutions such as the Global Positioning System to keep you from getting lost, here are a few hints from the mountaineering community that can help you to find the way on walks where you have to retrace your route.

First, become aware of the landscape around you. Look for features that are distinct and recognisable. As mountaineers climb, they are continuously conscious of features along their route—a crevasse, an exposed boulder, a turn in a ridge, a change in slope angle, an overhang or roof—and of the distances between these features, so that they know where they are when they descend the mountain.

Do the same when you walk. Whenever there is a turn in the track or it becomes faint or difficult to follow—and especially at a track junction—take the time to look around and pick out features: a termite mound, a moss-covered granite boulder, or a burnt-out tree-trunk that you can identify on the way back.

Secondly, take the time to turn round frequently and look at where you've just been.

manufactured and distributed by *Kinetic Technology International*; the *MT310*, by *CME Electrophone*. Standard Communications (it is also widely available from *Snowgum* and *Paddy Pallin* shops).

First on the scene

A series of specifically 'tailored' first aid kits is now available from (and distributed by) new, Perth-based business *Wilderness*. *Wild* received two kits for inspection—the *Active* and the *Off Track*. Both appeared to be of a good standard and well arranged. (Also available are the *Deep Water Expedition*, *Outer Reef* and *Beach first aid* kits.) Two sizes of *Water Resistant Pouches* were received by *Wild* as well. These 'dry bags' (each with a Velcro and buckle



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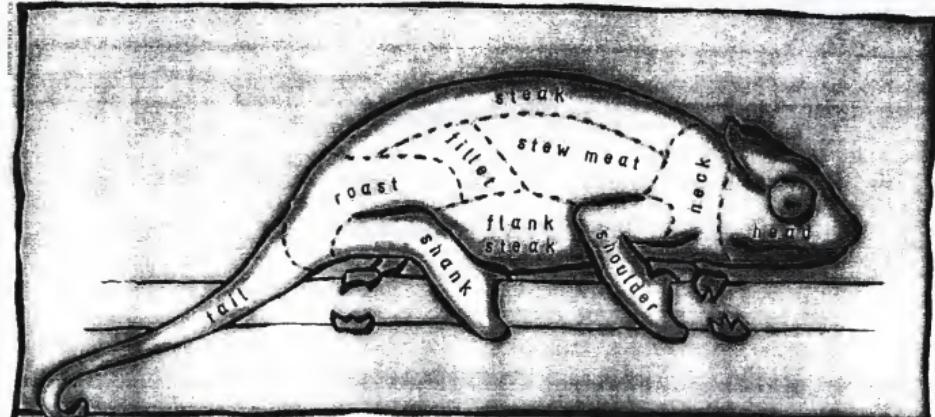
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provide good and comparable performance when used under tree cover. However, this is not to imply that these units will work in all situations. No matter how good your unit is, lush foliage and surrounding mountains may still play havoc with the reception of microwave satellite signals.

While GPS technology has developed at a rapid rate, retail prices have plummeted. (Prices also fluctuate significantly, so shop around before you buy.) The Silva XL 1000 costs twice as much as any other model in the survey. Silva has explained the high price by stating that the XL 1000 is more sensitive than other receivers. In my opinion this claim was generally correct a year or even six months ago; however, other manufacturers have caught up since then. Our 'road tests' found the performances of every brand to be very similar. The XL 1000 offers 'bells and whistles' features such as an electronic compass. While some bushwalkers may find these to be of use their inclusion does not justify such a huge price difference.

A number of other models in the table may have additional features of special interest to non-bushwalkers. The 'value for money' ratings in the table are based on the interests of bushwalkers and other rucksack-sports enthusiasts who want a GPS to lead them through the wilds on multiday trips; the ratings do not take into account (possibly

quite 'valuable') features desirable for other uses.

Shortly after completing this survey we received word of a new, hand-held GPS unit, the VALSAT SP (not included in the table). Expected to be on sale by the time you read this, the VALSAT SP has extensive, onscreen help menus. We didn't have the opportunity to test this GPS; however, it is claimed to use an eight-channel, parallel receiver, is manufactured by the French defence-electronics company MLR, and is expected to retail for less than \$500.

Hans Fah

RUCKSACKS

• Planetary designs?

A swag of new gear follows the amalgamation of *Adventure Designs* and *One Planet* (see Equipment, *Wild* no 66). From One Planet, the appealing *Stiletto* (60–70 litres) and *Vertex* (50 litres) are two new *alpine packs*. Each of these stylish packs features a crampon patch, reflective tape and accessory loops. The *Bounty* and *Tasman* (both 65–85 litres) are *hybrid rucksacks*, merging the needs of bushwalking and travel. All four packs are made with

points to watch

- GPS receivers can fail for a variety of reasons. Therefore find out the warranty period for the unit in question. GPS receiver warranties seem to vary from 12 to 36 months.
- Don't take glossy advertising verbatim. Obviously GPS receiver manufacturers like to hype up only their good points. It's also easy to get misled by technical speak.
- Check out the quality of the user manual. When the manual is easy to understand, with good diagrams, it will be much more fun to learn to use your new toy.
- For many, a GPS receiver can be a perplexing piece of equipment. If you're not a navigation/GPS guru

- find out whether your supplier can offer you training in GPS operation and navigation.
- Don't be distracted by bells-and-whistles features. The primary feature you'll use for outdoors activities is the position display.
- Don't just buy a GPS receiver because some high-profile organisation like the United Nations purchased a million of a particular brand. Your needs are most probably quite different, to say the least.
- Do your homework and make sure that you're buying a latest generation GPS receiver, not old stock.
- Never rely solely on a GPS unit for navigation—like any piece of modern electronics, it can fail. Always carry spare batteries and be prepared to take over the navigation with a map and compass.

Wild Equipment Survey

Lightweight GPS units

Type of receiver (name of manufacturer)	Number and Type of batteries	Ease of use	Displays	Value for money	Comments	Approx. price, \$
Eagle/Lowrance USA						
Eagle Explorer	Prl (12)	4AA**	***	***	*****	Heaps of features. Not the most user-friendly unit but outstanding value
Global Nav 200	Prl (12)	4AA**	***	***	***	'Deluxe' version of the Eagle Explorer. Has external antenna socket
Garmen Taiwan						
GPS 12	Prl (12)	4AA	****	****	*****	User-friendly, no-frills, compact personal GPS. Has position-averaging feature
GPS 2 Plus	Prl (12)	4AA	****	****	***	Unique landscape format screen
GPS 12XL	Prl (12)	4AA	****	****	***	'Deluxe' version of the GPS 12. Offers position averaging and has external antenna socket
Magellan Mexico/Taiwan						
GPS 2000	Prl (12)	4AA	****	***	*****	User-friendly, no-frills, compact personal GPS
GPS 4000XL	Prl (12)	4AA	****	****	***	More rugged, 'deluxe' version of the GPS 2000
Trailblazer XL	Mpx (2*)	3AA	****	****	**	Larger format GPS with Australian map grid display
Silva Sweden						
XL 1000	Prl (SI)	6AA	**	**	*	Has built-in electronic compass and bubble spirit-level.

* poor ** average *** good **** excellent * can track 12 satellites ** also operates on nickel metal hydride rechargeable battery Mpx = multiplexer receiver board Prl = Parallel receiver board All GPS surveyed offer Australian map grid (AMG) coordinates. The country listed after the manufacturer's name is the country in which the products are made

Waterloc Grid material. RRP \$399, \$239, \$489 and \$579, respectively. From Adventure Designs: the *Flashback* tent (single pole, 1.75 kilograms) is a one-person tent ideal if you want to walk light. RRP \$299. For spending time on your backside, either the (portable and collapsible) *Earth Seat* and/or *Earth Chair* may be the thing—they retail at around \$50. Two *day-packs* are also available, the *Scout* and the *Hoota*. RRP \$75 and \$80–\$90, respectively. The *Buddy* (65–75 litres) is another *hybrid rucksack*, while the *Tom Thumb III travel pack* features a handy expandable gusset which adds a very useful extra 10 litres to the capacity of this pack. RRP \$349 and \$369, respectively.

One Planet Stiletto rucksack.



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PS receivers

No lost cause—a *Wild* survey

With new Global Positioning System receivers being pumped out almost every six months, the GPS industry is one of the most dynamic around, perhaps second only to the computer industry. However, unlike a personal computer a personal GPS navigator doesn't really become obsolete overnight since north will always be north (or let's hope so, anyway). For example, a GPS receiver manufactured two or even four years ago will still navigate the owner around the country as reliably as a latest generation GPS receiver. The only major change to a GPS receiver in its first 12 months of life is usually a steep dive in price.

Because of fierce competition between GPS receiver manufacturers each new product launch provides us with superior receivers. Since the last *Wild* GPS receiver survey (in *Wild* no 51), notable improvements have been made in miniaturisation, user-friendliness, power efficiency and receiver sensitivity. Put simply, a present-generation GPS receiver will fit into your top pocket, be easy to use and work much better under tree cover than most old GPS units.

Until very recently, some of the brands surveyed were based upon lower-perform-



This survey summarises the findings of the writer, who was selected for the task because of his knowledge of the subject and his impartiality, among other things. The survey was checked and verified by Glenn Tempest and reviewed by at least three of *Wild*'s editorial staff. It is based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of this issue's production; ranges and specifications may have changed in the weeks since then.

Some aspects of this survey, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgment on the part of the author, the referee and *Wild*, space being a key consideration. 'Value' is based primarily upon price relative to features and quality. A product with more elaborate or specialised features may be rated more highly by someone whose main concern is not price.

An important criterion for inclusion in this *Wild* survey is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors- or GPS shops in the central business districts of major Australian capital- and other cities. Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and for the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.

Those wimpy little hand-held GPS units are all very well... (High on Mt Twynam, Snowy Mountains, New South Wales.) Janusz Molinski

ance, one- or two-channel multiplex receivers (refer to *Wild* no 51 for a detailed description of receiver types; see also *Wild Ideas* in *Wild* no 47). These GPS units just didn't come up to scratch when used under even light tree cover. At the time of this survey all models reviewed had been updated to incorporate 5–12 channel parallel receivers. The only exception is the Magellan Trailblazer XL which still uses a two-channel, multiplex receiver (consequently the Trailblazer XL can be expected to perform more slowly under tree cover). Magellan did not make any big announcement or change the names of its models when each was upgraded—make sure that you don't unintentionally make the mistake of purchasing an older-generation Magellan.

Apart from the older Trailblazer XL, all the units surveyed

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- Q. When you power off your existing GPS will all your favourite fishing spots, 4WD tracks or hiking trails be saved ?
- A. **Eagle** GPS units are equipped with a built in 10 year lithium battery which will store all those favourite spots for years to come, regardless of whether the unit is being used or not.
- Q. Is the GPS unit you own or the one you are considering buying fitted with a multi-channel **parallel** receiver ?
- A. All **Eagle** GPS units have multi-channel **parallel** receivers which track satellites simultaneously. Being a **parallel** receiver means all channels are continuously monitoring satellite location to ensure you have the fastest fix and the most accurate position in any conditions.

Single Channel or multiplexing is old technology.

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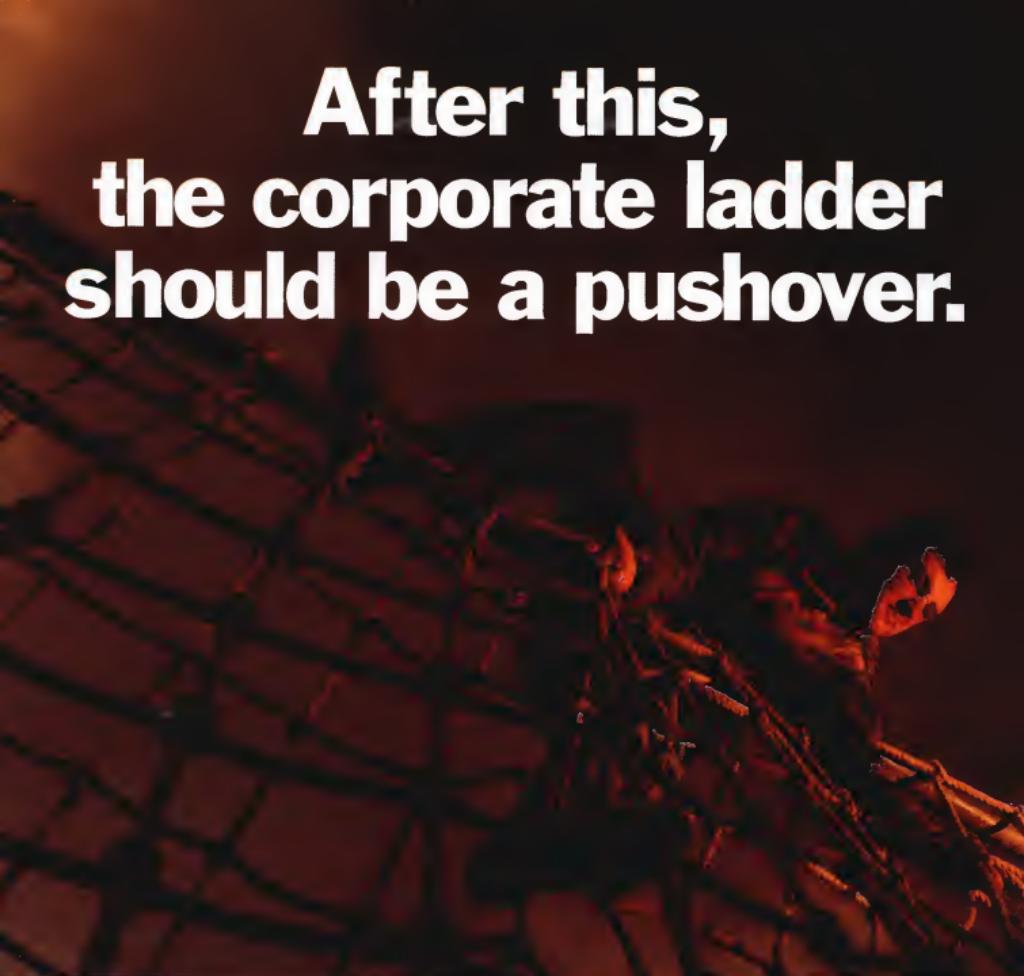


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points to watch

Interior size

Lie down and make sure that the inner is long enough and the roof high enough for you to fit inside. Sit up and test whether you can change your clothes easily. It is not much fun to put on a shirt or jacket while lying on the tent floor.

Entrances

Entrances vary widely and you should test how difficult it is to get in and out. Consider what the tent will be like in poor weather when you are trying to remove your waterproof jacket as you crawl in.

Separate pitching

At times all you need is an insect screen, not a tent. Check how easy it is to put up the inner without the fly.

Ease of pitch

If possible, you should see a tent being put up and taken down at least once before you buy it. Can the poles be inserted from either end? Are they the same size? Do they have to be inserted in a preferred order? Are the pole ends difficult to attach? Can you adjust the tent so that it remains taut as it stretches and ages?

Door design

Many of these tents use the door for ventilation. Check whether you can leave the door open while it rains—in some tents the rain falls directly on to the inner when the door is open.

Gear storage

Lofts or pockets are handy for small items. Are there attachment points for internal clothes-lines? Examine the storage space in both the inner and the vestibule—is it out of the way or do you have to clamber over your gear when you are getting in or out? You should check whether the vestibule is high enough to stand your pack in. While you can lay your pack down, you are more likely to have to stand on it to get in and out of the tent.

given to the nearest five centimetres). Many catalogues overstate these sizes and seem to quote the overall size of the floor material, which includes the raised 'bathtub' sides of the floor.

Total weight. This includes everything that is supplied when the tent is purchased, as claimed by the manufacturer. Some manufacturers provide seam-sealers and other extras but these do not make a significant difference to the overall weight. All tents surveyed are claimed to weigh three kilograms or less.

Materials. Most modern tents have a proofed-nylon floor; an inner of very light, water-repellent fabrics or mesh; and a waterproof fly. The fly material can be either the traditional, proofed nylon or a proofed polyester. The use of polyester is a recent change and there has been much hype about its 'superior properties'. Overall, there is greater variation in the quality of a particular material than between different materials. As a general guide, the more technical information is supplied about a material, the better the cloth is likely to be.

Some outdoors enthusiasts seem to believe that a Ripstop cloth cannot be torn. That is a fallacy. The thicker threads certainly resist tearing but all lightweight cloths used on these tents can be torn, so take care.

Poles. All tents surveyed have aluminium, shock-corded poles. The Easton 7075 poles are acknowledged as being the best available and are easily recognised by their

gold colour. Some tents use slightly softer poles which are usually black or silver and are often given the number '7001'.

While not as stiff as the 7075, they perform well in most situations and usually bend rather than break when overstressed. Poles are made in a number of different diameters and you should check carefully to make certain that you have the right one when you purchase a spare- or replacement pole.

Minimum pegs are the number required to put up the tent and fly. The **maximum** includes all peg- and storm-guy attachment points.

Roominess. This takes into account the manufacturer's intended capacity and rates this against the inner area, gear storage, head clearance and overall space. Some tents with small inners rate well as they have huge vestibules while others with seemingly large inners have less 'useful space' due to sloping walls or small doorways. My size (I am 1.8 metres tall), experience with a wide variety of tents, and personal preferences affect this rating. As everybody has different needs, the best test is to lie down inside a tent and consider where you will want to place your gear and how you will use the space provided.

Ventilation. The position and size of ventilation points have been considered. Some designs tend to work better than others, with tapered tunnels performing very well as the shape draws warm, moist air to the vent in the door. At the other end of the scale, domes with their high inners are harder to ventilate. Remember that vents do not work at all if they are not opened and the direction of the wind and the nature of your camp-site will also influence their effectiveness. But no matter what vents there are, you are bound to have some unpleasant, sticky nights in warm, rainy weather.

Ease of pitch. This will be affected by the presence of continuous pole sleeves,

the width of the pole sleeves (some are very narrow!), by whether the poles cross (which makes a tent harder to erect) and by the way differing pole- and material lengths are configured.

Stability. This is the overall resistance of a tent to side forces. As we cannot test the tents in a wind-tunnel this rating is subjective and is determined by my observation of how the various designs perform in the field. Small features such as the attachments between the fly and inner, the use of internal stiffeners and how well the panels are cut can make a big difference.

Value. This is not simply a value-for-money rating. I have considered the weight of the tent, its overall features and quality, and its size—as well as the price—in rating its value as a general-purpose, three-season tent. A 'poor' rating does not mean that the tent is poor; merely that on the criteria outlined I would not select it for my own three-season use.

Price can vary widely; tents are sometimes heavily discounted. Shop around, but do not expect huge discounts particularly for the most popular and highest quality tents. You should also consider the service a shop provides, such as repairs and provision for the return of faulty goods—sometimes it is worth paying a little extra as an insurance policy should things go wrong with your expensive new toy. As a tent will cost less than a couple of dollars a night to use, tents are really quite cheap considering how well they work.

Price does give some indication of quality and the amount of effort that went into the design. Tents made in Australia and New Zealand are generally higher in price but are of excellent quality. Tents made elsewhere in the region can also be of high quality but their quality can vary—examine the little things: stitching, placement of features and materials used as well as the manufacturer's reputation regarding tents.

You will not find all the tents surveyed here in any one shop or even in every State; there are only two brands (Eureka and Macpac) which are available almost everywhere. Tents take up a lot of floor space and are expensive to stock—most shops have only two or three brands and a few models on display. To see a wide variety it is necessary to visit many shops.

Most tents come with a 'care and use' pamphlet or have a tag sewn into the inner giving such details. Always make sure that your tent is thoroughly dried and aired before you store it, and keep it away from petroleum-based liquid fuels. With normal use a good tent should last for many years and provide many comfortable, dry nights.

*John Chapman (see Contributors in *Wild* no 11) is one of Australia's most widely travelled and respected bushwalking writers. He is particularly well known for his books of Tasmanian track notes.*

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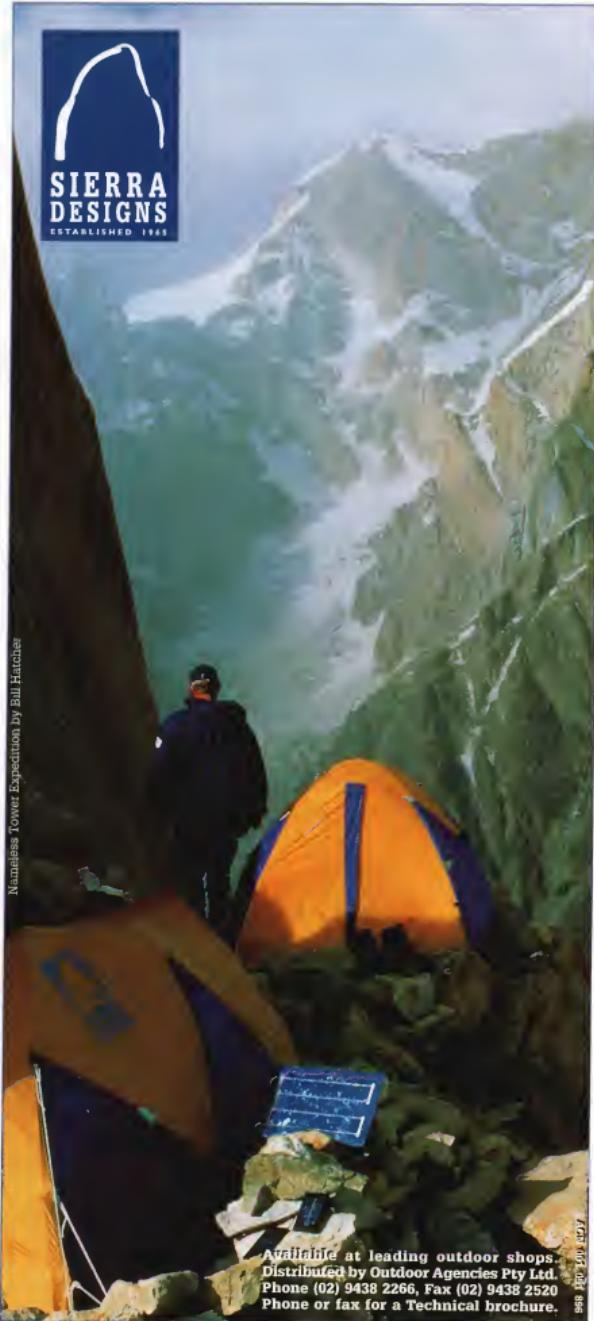
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your selection rather than ranking the tents from 'best to worst'.

'Three season' implies use in sheltered walking areas like the Blue Mountains; the rainforests of Queensland; and the dry eucalypt forests of Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. Desert walking areas, the tropics (except during the wet season) and coastal regions also have 'three-season' conditions; in fact, this category of tent is suitable for the majority of Australia's popular bushwalking areas. Some tents which may fit into this category appear in the one-person-shelter survey in *Wild* no 60.)

The ratings throughout this survey have been given for 'three-season use' and are *not* to be directly com-

pared with tents in the four-season-tent survey in *Wild* no 63.

Design. To produce a lightweight product, tent designers have come up with new ideas—the range of designs available at present is quite amazing. I have grouped the tents into six categories. Some tents are actually hybrids of various designs and are difficult to classify. The 'east-west' design has the single pole running at right angles to an occupant who is lying down—it could be regarded as a 'one-pole tunnel' and has a sloping roof above the head and feet which reduces internal space. The 'north-south' is another single-pole design; here the pole is parallel to the occupant. A 'tunnel' tent has two or three poles parallel to each other; the two outside are of the same size. The

'tapered tunnel' has the largest pole at the door end. This usually improves ventilation as an opening can be built into the highest point, but this tent is not quite as stable in strong winds.

The sturdiest design of all is the 'dome', which is basically a hemisphere with a floor plan (or fly plan) that is a hexagon. This design is characterised by extensive use of crossed poles that give these tents much of their rigidity. On the negative side, dome tents are in general not as well ventilated. The 'pyramid' is a tepee-style design with a single, central, vertical pole.

Maximum internal dimensions. These have been measured as the maximum distance along the ground of the inner floor of a pitched tent (and are

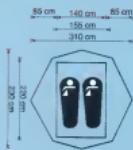
Wild Gear Survey

Three-season tents

Brand	Model	Capacity	Design	Minimum external dimensions (width, height, length)	Total weight,	Material	Number of poles	Number of pegs (minimum/maximum)	Number of vestibules	Number of entrances to fly	Rainproof	Ventilation	Ease of pitch	Stability	Value	Avg price, \$
Adventure Designs China																
Fastback	2	TT	220 x 150 x 115	2.3	Polyester	2	5/15	1	1	•	••	•••	•½	•••	360	
Ridgeback II	2	E-W	220 x 120 x 125	2.7	Polyester	1	4/20	2	2	••½	•••	•••	••	••••	400	
Black Diamond Taiwan																
Megarid*	4	P	270 x 270 x 210	1.6	Nylon	1	4/8	n/a	1+	•••	••	•••½	••	•½	330	
Eureka Korea																
Bike & Hike	2	N-S	270 x 145 x 115	2.3	Nylon	1	4/8	1	1	••½	•½	••½	•½	••	300	
Moondog	2	TT	225 x 145 x 115	2.2	Nylon	2	3/9	1	1	•	•½	••½	•½	••	350	
Autumn Wind	2	Dome	245 x 145 x 110	2.6	Nylon	3	2/10	1	1	•••	•½	•••	••	••••	420	
Fairydown China																
Siege	2	TT	220 x 125 x 115	2.8	Nylon	2	4/14	1	1	••	••	•••½	•••	•••	500	
Kathmandu Korea																
Northstar	2	Dome	230 x 125 x 110	2.8	Polyester	3	5/13	1	1	••½	••	•••½	•••½	••½	700	
Macpac New Zealand																
Apollo	2	Dome	220 x 140 x 110	2.9	Polyester	2	2/12	2	2	•••½	•••½	••••	•½	•½	500	
Lunar	2	E-W	260 x 120 x 120	2.6	Polyester	1	6/12	2	2	••••	•••	••••	•½	•½	590	
Celeste	2	E-W	215 x 120 x 105	3	Polyester	2	4/12	2	2	•••	•••½	•••	•••	•½	680	
Salewa China/Korea																
Saree**	2	Dome	215 x 140 x 115	2.8	Polyester	3	2/12	1	1	•••	•½	••	••••	•½	330	
Blanca	2	TT	220 x 130 x 100	2.3	Polyester	3	2/7	1	1	•½	•½	••	••	•••	430	
Alegria	2	Dome	220 x 150 x 105	2.4	Polyester	3	2/12	2	2	•••	••	••	••	•••	590	
Sierra Designs China																
Clip Flashlight	2	TT	225 x 145 x 105	1.6	Nylon	2	4/14	1	1	•½	•	•••	••	••½	350	
Onion	2	Dome	225 x 140 x 110	2.5	Nylon	3	6/15	1	1	•••	••	•••½	••½	••½	390	
Clip 3	3	TT	240 x 190 x 115	2.3	Nylon	2	4/15	1	1	••	•	•••	•½	•••	400	
Snowgum China																
Strifrite	2	TT	270 x 1-5 x 115	2.4	Polyester	2	4/16	1	1	•	••	•••½	•	•••	330	
Elba	2	E-W	230 x 135 x 120	2.8	Polyester	1	4/16	2	2	••••	•••½	•••	•½	••••	380	
Vango China																
Mono 200T	2	T	225 x 125 x 90	2.9	Nylon\$	2	4/24	1	1#	•½	•	••	••	•½	630	
Wilderness Equipment Australia																
Shadow***	2	E-W	210 x 120 x 110	2.7	Nylon	1	4/10	2	2	••	••	•••½	••	•½	700	

* poor ** average *** good **** excellent E-W = east-west-style poles N-S = north-south-style poles Pyramid Tunnel TT = tapered tunnel * does not have a floor ** also available with two vestibules *** also available with a heavier weight material for floor and/or roof \$ # single-skin tent—no fly † not seen by referee § made from Hytex—a nylon-based, waterproof/breathable material The country listed after the manufacturer's name is the country in which the products are made; while this is correct at the time the survey was conducted, some manufacturers regularly vary the place of manufacture of their products, particularly within Asia.

SIERRA LEONE



The Sierra Leone is the most popular model in the Salewa range. The fly sheet extends down to earth & can be pitched first in wet weather or by itself to provide a lightweight (2 kg) single-skin shelter for up to 4 people. Two vestibules allow for excellent cross ventilation, storage space & cooking area.
Weight: 3.2 kg

Light & Strong by

- Flame retardant waterproof coatings
- Tent floor waterproof to 10,000 millimetres
- Tent flysheet waterproofed to 4,000 millimetres
- Tent poles, 11 millimetres duralium 7001 T6 alloy

All Salewa tents feature polyester fly-sheets with a high UV resistance (two-three times that of nylon), which means your tent will last longer, with the added bonus of only half the stretch of nylon giving better pitch & stability. The inner, have a genuine 'bathtub', floor construction, lantern loops & handy storage pockets. Inner tent entrances have additional mosquito net doors to ensure maximum 'flow-thru' ventilation and provide a welcome sanctuary from annoying insects.



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MAGNUM SPACE

A larger 3 person version with all the proven characteristics of the Leone tent. The Magnum offers spacious comfort and unequalled wind stability.
Weight: 4.3 kg.



MICRA

A lightweight 2 person tent, the Micra is ideal where weight is a primary consideration. The Micra has a large entrance and roomy vestibule to protect equipment from the elements.
Weight: 2.3 kg. Fly: Polyester, 2,500 mm proofing.
Floor: Nylon 3,000 mm Proofing.
Poles: 9 mm 7001 T6

T three-season tents

John Chapman delivers his pitch



This survey

summarises the

findings of the writer,

who was selected for the task

because of his knowledge of the

subject and his impartiality, among other

things. The survey was checked and verified by

Roger Caffin, and reviewed by at least three of

Wild's editorial staff. It is based on the items' availability

and specifications at the time of this issue's production; however, ranges and specifications may have changed in the

weeks since then.

Some aspects of this survey, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgment on the part of the author, the referee and *Wild*, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily on price, relative to features and quality. A more expensive product may be better suited for some uses or be judged more highly by someone whose main concerns are features and quality.

An important criterion for inclusion in a *Wild* survey is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of major Australian capital- and other cities.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.

The tents surveyed have been designed with restricted uses in mind. In general, tents in this range are ideal for use at campsites where there is some shelter. If you are caught out in a windy place each of these tents should survive—but don't expect to have a very comfortable or dry night, especially compared to the protection afforded by the four-season tents surveyed in *Wild* no 63.

The ideal three-season tent has plenty of space, is very light and easy to erect, has excellent ventilation and is strong enough in nearly every weather condition. Most of the tents surveyed here satisfy many of the above criteria but none is ideal for everybody or for every conceivable use. Because people's priorities vary, this survey presents as much information as possible to help you with

Is this a one-season tent?
(Above Happy Falls, Gor-

don River, Tasmania.)

Alphonse Landman

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SOUTH AUSTRALIA FLINDERS CAMPING – ADELAIDE, MOUNTAINS DESIGNS – ADELAIDE, SCOUT OUTDOOR CENTRE – ADELAIDE, THORPADDY PALLIN – ADELAIDE, THE DISPOSAL SHOP – MT GAMBIER.

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WESTERN AUSTRALIA CARGILLS GREAT OUTDOOR CENTRE – VICTORIA PARK, MOUNTAIN DESIGNS – PERTH, FREEMANTLE, MAIN PEAK – COTTESLOE, PADDY PALLIN – PERTH, WILDERNESS EQUIPMENT – CLAREMONT, SNOWGUM – PERTH

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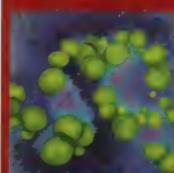
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Soon after the car park gate is passed there is another gate. (From here on the track is suitable for walkers only.) It climbs the side of a short ridge and then leaves its westerly course to head southward to avoid the deep valley of the Kerript River. Open eucalypt forest borders the track, which after about three kilometres resumes its westward direction. Antarctic beech forest becomes more prominent and the mind tends to concentrate on the variety of colour, shape, size and texture of these majestic trees rather than on the steady plodding of feet. Rest breaks and lunch can be enjoyed in a grotto of your choice. Some water may be found, depending on weather conditions.

About three-quarters of the way to Wombat Creek (where the track leaves the *Gloster Tops* map) running water is available near a gate where the track climbs beside a tributary of the Kerript River.

There are some more uphill sections as your route crosses on to the *Barrington Tops* map and your long day is nearly at an end. Above Wombat Creek is a signposted National Park camp-site. Good water and cosy tent nooks are a feature. This site is popular when there are many visitors in the park. You might like to camp back in the trees along the track; a little further to water but less crowded.

Wombat Creek can be the base camp for a day-walk tour of the central plateau area before heading back along the Link Trail on the third day. Without a heavy pack, most of the plateau features can be visited on a pleasant day walk on the second day. The following is a suggestion.

A few hundred metres beyond Wombat Creek camp-site the routes of the three access tracks come together. At this three-way junction the southerly or left-hand track leads down to Selby Alley Hut. It's worth a look but the narrow foot track access is tricky to find. To continue in this direction would mean the descent of the plateau by way of the Corker.

From the three-way junction the right-hand track leads up to Careys Peak. There are signposts in this area. Careys Peak is not the highest point but it is the most spectacular. The narrow foot track to the summit is at the far end of the small, grassy clearing. There is a rough shelter hut in a

bad state of repair; it would be used only in emergencies. Water can usually be found over the escarpment to the left of the hut.

A short climb to the lookout and finally you get a view—and what a view! Below your feet the ground disappears into the Allyn River valley. Beyond the forests are the farmlands of the Hunter Valley. Beyond those are the sandhills along the Pacific Ocean northward from Newcastle. There are few places in Australia where you can stand in snow and see the ocean. To the right or westward is the lion shape of Mt Royal and further behind you are the great plateau and the vast, water-soaked plains or swamps. A distinct boundary can be seen between the dark-green Antarctic beech on the escarpment and the olive-green snow gums on the plateau.

The direction indicator at the lookout was placed in 1934 at a time when there were plans to make Barrington the Kosciuszko of the north, with ski slopes, trout dams and guest-houses. Luckily the plans were not carried out and we now have National Parks, wilderness and World Heritage rainforest, hopefully for all time.

If you are fortunate and have clear weather, try to be on Careys Peak to see a sunrise or sunset.

Junction Pools, back on the plateau, is the next destination. It can be reached by a long four-wheel-drive track over Mt Barrington or by going overland round the swamps. The swamp-route track can be picked up near the gate behind Careys Peak. It leads round the southern edge of Saxbys Swamp and on to Edwards Swamp. These grassy frost hollows were used for grazing in the past. Old fence lines and hut ruins remain. Keep to the rough track—these grassy plains look easy but their central feature is a deep, narrow, fast-flowing stream. It is best to approach Junction Pools from the knoll marked with 'ruins' on the *Barrington Tops* map.

Barrington Falls is a worthwhile side-trip but the downstream approach is scrubby.

Junction Pools is another established camp-site. It's a good spot to swim or rest. If the scenic swamp route is taken, a boots-off crossing may have to be made.

From Junction Pools the track over Aeroplane Hill to Black Swamp should be taken. This track is sometimes overgrown by the dreaded broom but it is regularly slashed. It is best to keep to tracks on the plateau to avoid being lost in the broom.

In 1945 a Mosquito bomber crashed into the eastern side of Aeroplane Hill, killing the crew of two. The small pieces



Careys Hut. Greg Powell

of wreckage that still remain are very hard to find now.

At Black Swamp there is another small camp-site tucked away in the tussock grass. It is not far now to walk back to Wombat Creek. If you have time for a side-trip, the left-hand track can be followed down to the Big Hole—a large lake on a bend of the Barrington River. This is a good spot to camp or swim.

You can rest easy on the second night, confident in the knowledge that you have experienced a wide cross-section of the Barrington Plateau. On day three you retrace your steps from day one, but it's just as interesting in reverse. (If exits by way of Lagoon Pinch or Polblue are preferred, a long, time-consuming car shuttle is required before your walk unless you have a friendly chauffeur.)

You will certainly meet other walkers on the tracks or at the camp-sites. You may also meet mountain-bike riders, fishermen, four-wheel drivers or even the odd cross-country skier. All, like you, will have come to enjoy the unique attractions of the Barrington Tops.

Greg Powell is a primary school teacher who lives in Newcastle, NSW. He is a keen bushwalker who concentrates on 'historic hiking' and has written books on bushwalking in the Hunter Valley, the Blue Mountains and the Snowy Mountains. He is also the author of a number of books on bushrangers—the latest, about Ned Kelly, has just been released. He has contributed to *Wild* on a number of previous occasions.

The Barrington Tops



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The Barrington Plateau rises as part of the Great Dividing Range northwards from Newcastle in New South Wales. The name Barrington Tops usually refers to the Gloucester Tops and the Mt Royal Range—most of which are in the Barrington Tops National Park—as well. The Hunter-Manning river system rises here and altitudes reach to over 1500 metres. Snow is common in winter. Most bushwalking takes place on the plateau while cascading and canoeing are popular on the escarpments and lower slopes.

When to go

Barrington's altitude, the availability of water and a great selection of camp-sites make it a four-seasons venue. Summer can be pleasantly cool. Winter has the appeal of temporary snow, ice or frost without too much harsh exposure. Spring and autumn can be just perfect.

Warnings

As in all alpine regions, you must be prepared for changeable weather. Exposed areas are rare but bleak winter conditions can spoil the experience for an unprepared, ill-equipped party. Summer snowfalls are possible and summer thunderstorms are probable. There are only three shelter huts and these have been sited more for pleasure than for emergencies.

Road conditions vary according to the weather. If in doubt, telephone the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Raymond Terrace, on (02) 4987 3108 or Forestry, Gloucester, on (02) 6558 1005.

Maps and references

The best maps are the 1:100 000 *Barrington Tops and Gloucester District Tourist Map* and the 1:25 000 *Gloucester Tops, Barrington Tops and Moonan Brook* maps.

Barry Collier's book *Walking and Touring in the Barrington Tops* (see Reviews, *Wild* no 64) is handy for background information and botanical notes but does not cover the walk that is detailed in these track notes. *Barrington Tops—A Vision Splendid* by Dulcie Hartley (46 Turnbull St, Fennell Bay, NSW 2283) relates the history of the Tops and the fight to conserve the area. It contains wonderful old photos of huts, scenery and people.

Barrington Tops grassland. Henry Gold

the walk at a glance

GRADE Easy-moderate

LENGTH Two but preferably three days

TYPE Subalpine

REGION Hunter-Manning,
NSW Great Divide

BEST TIME All year

SPECIAL POINTS

Be prepared for four
seasons in one day

Access

The first and rather popular approach to the plateau begins at Lagoon Pinch after a drive by way of Dungog and Barrington Guest House or the Upper Allyn camping area. The walk is steep and the track (old road) climbs the southern escarpment. The plateau can be reached in a long day walk but exhaustion often diminishes the enjoyment. This route includes the aptly named Corker.

The second route begins at Polblue camping area after a drive from Scone or Aberdeen by way of Moonan Flat. The gravel road climbs the western escarpment and then there is a relatively flat walk into the central plateau area. You should allow at least two days here to see some worthwhile features. This route includes muddy four-wheel-drive tracks and although flat much of it is through the curse of Barrington Scotch broom. There are three problems with Barrington Tops: broom, broom and broom. This weed escaped from a nearby farm garden many years ago and is now a huge problem for graziers as well as for National Park staff. Biological control is being attempted with three different insects which eat seeds, mine twigs and suck sap, respectively. It is to be hoped that the bugs will win.

These track notes are primarily concerned with a third approach; it is long, scenic and flat. This route is known as the Gloucester-Barrington Link Trail and is reached by a long gravel road up the eastern escarpment from the Buckets Way, nine kilometres south of the town of Gloucester. The route is signposted. Many concrete river fords could cause problems after periods of heavy rain.

The Gloucester Tops caravan park (just outside the Barrington Tops National Park boundary) can provide basic supplies and camp-sites or you can camp in the adjacent Gloucester River camping area (just inside the park boundary) for the first night. A further, steep drive leads to the start of the walk near the Darby Munro Hut (turn right before reaching Gloucester Falls). It is 31 kilometres from the Buckets Way turn-off to the camping area and a further 12 kilometres to the start of the walk.

The walk

According to the sign it is a 20 kilometre walk (but the map indicates that it is less) from the car park at the gate near the Darby Munro Hut to the camp-site at Wombat Creek. The walk is mostly flat, the scenery varies and it's not exposed to bad weather. It can be done as a long day walk (my 11- and 7-year-old sons have done it). Camp-sites along the track are many but good running water won't be found until the last few kilometres. There are no panoramic views from the track as it follows forested ridges. The vegetation is varied and includes beech forest, snow gums, tussock grass, banksia and eucalypt forest. The track is easy to follow and there are no side tracks to cause confusion.

track notes - easier walking

The Barrington is tops

Walking the high country near Newcastle, by Greg Powell



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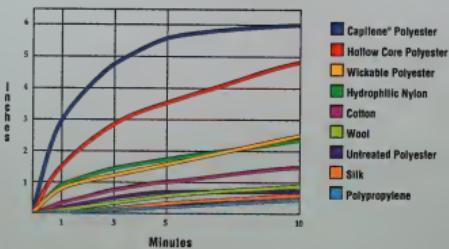
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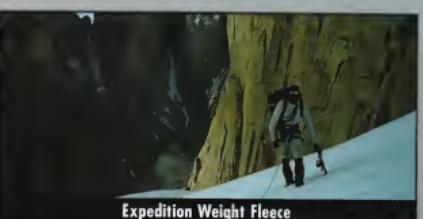
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(GR 565805)—this requires careful navigation. (Note that you will go through a gate in a fence which separates the part of the country used for grazing cattle from that being rehabilitated.) From the high point travel south-west to the Blowhole. Snow lovers will imagine it white, blanketed in snow and will vow to come back in mid-winter.

After an hour, you will come to a large cairn on the summit of the Bluff with spectacular views of the arc of mountains formed by Magdala–Howitt–Crosscut Saw–Buggery–Speculation, as well as Mt McDonald. Mt Buller is recognisable by its ski-lifts. In the distance the Macalister valley and the Dargo High Plains can be seen to the south and south-east, respectively; and, on a clear day, so can Mt Bogong, Mt Feathertop and some other, 'developed' mountains to the north. Eagles Peaks (subject of the next walk) are distinctly visible as the ridge to the west.

The track down is reasonably obvious (although once when I was a student the entire school seemed determined to go down a gully 200 metres further south-west and 90° contrary to the correct bearing). In poor visibility go west into the trees and then follow this line north to the cliff. The cairns marking the descent should be clear from here (GR 544788).

The track down is steep but is worth taking slowly so that you can admire the curious shapes of the contorted snow gums and also have a look at the rock formations as the cliffs subside. Forty minutes should take you to the car park at the 'base' of the Bluff. As a result of new roadworks, the Bluff is no longer easily accessible by two-wheel-drive vehicles; there is not sufficient clearance on the road. Continue walking down this road to Refrigerator Gap (GR

534800; called Rocky Ridge Saddle by some). This space has astounding acoustics and it is thus well worth taking along a book of songs for four parts! From the gap/saddle, take the northern walking track up to Rocky Ridge. The track swings to the south-west for one kilometre before the persistent descent from 1433 metres to the Howqua at 550 metres. After a rest at Eight Mile Flat, walk back to Seven Mile and break out the scroggin you left in the car!

first 500 metres of height are gained (GR 432825) there is a respite of reasonably flat walking for about two kilometres. The spur, clearly marked on the *Buller South* map, heads roughly south-east and is always very well defined. The first of the tall Eagles Peaks (1423 metres, GR 475787) is the turn-off for the return spur; it is, however, worth going out to the furthest and highest peak (GR 486777) to see the full majesty of the



Above it all, on the Bluff.

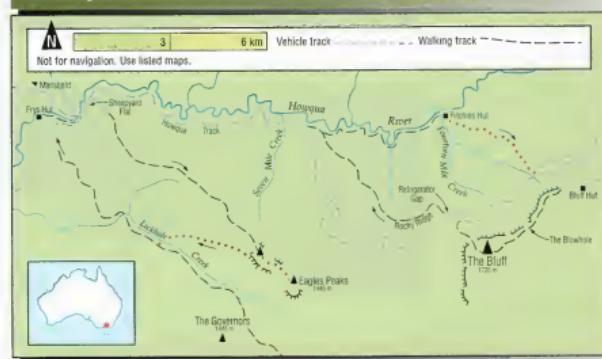
Eagles Peaks

This is a very long day walk, which most students at Timbertop used to regard as the toughest of the 'get fit' first term. Again beginning at Sheepyard Flat, rise early and set off for the Tunnel Spur Track about 500 metres eastward along the road. The track starts in a south-easterly direction. Once the

Bluff and Mt McDonald from such an exposed point.

The return spur requires thorough navigation. There is only a foot-pad made by the students rather than a full-blown track. The bottom of this track needs careful description: if you have followed the middle of the spur faithfully you will come across an old loggers' camp at an altitude of about 680 metres (GR 453789). From here, be careful to find the track that leads you safely across Lickhole Creek to the Lickhole Track. Gaiters are essential here as even on the track you will find that nettles and some blackberries can cause extreme discomfort. After following the track for about two kilometres you will have to cross the creek again (GR 433801—just after Malcolms Creek). There is a log—or you can jump, or you can wade across and get your feet wet. Soon after this you can remove your gaiters if you find them uncomfortable. The track back to Sheepyard Flat from here is easy to follow. It heads north-west to meet a four-wheel-drive track. Continue north-west along this track to Frys Hut and from here travel east along the Howqua River back to Sheepyard Flat. ☺

Howqua River area



Alan Daley was a student at Timbertop in 1988 and returned in 1992 as a camp assistant. His love of the surrounding peaks and valleys has since been fuelled on many trips to the area, particularly with the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club of which he is an active member.

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The walks described here are inspired by my memories of Timbertop, the outdoor-education campus of Geelong Grammar School in Victoria's High Country and brainchild of the one-time headmaster, James Darling. (He approved of the site chosen by the first Head of Campus, Edward Montgomery, because the water improved the taste of whisky—or so legend has it.) Timbertop was founded 45 years ago and its students have been bushwalking and ski-touring in the area ever since. Many other schools and groups also use the nearby tracks and routes for outdoor-education activities. As a former student at Timbertop I keenly recall the Bluff, a prominent peak in the

area and the subject of the first walk described here, especially since it provided me with the 'invaluable experience' of becoming hypothermic!

The walks described start from Sheepyard Flat, about two hours' drive north-east of Melbourne, near Mansfield. There are views of Mt Stirling, the Crosscut Saw, and the Macalister valley from the surrounding peaks and ridges. The camp-sites at Sheepyard Flat are popular with campers, fishers and walkers and drop toilets, fireplaces and tables are among the amenities. There are

to carry several litres of water. Good-quality water may be found about 1.5 kilometres east of Bluff Hut (in the head of a gully at GR 593810). The quality of the water in the creek south of Bluff Hut is highly dubious; it may not be reliable after a hot summer.

Use a stove for cooking as lighting a fire degrades the sensitive alpine/subalpine landscape, especially grasslands.

● Maps

Two excellent maps of the area are handy when used in conjunction. The *Buller South* 1:25 000 Vicmap gives detailed topographical information and the track markings on the Victorian Mountain Tramping Club *King, Howqua and Jamieson Rivers* 1:50 000 map are very easy to follow. Useful water points and camp-sites are also shown. The *Buller South* map is highly desirable for the Eagles Peaks walk.

● Access

From Melbourne, drive along the Melba and Maroondah Highways to Mansfield; from further west or north, approach Mansfield by way of the Midland Highway, which cuts across the Hume Highway at Benalla. From Mansfield, take the 'snow road' east towards Mt Stirling/Mt Buller and shortly after the 80 kilometres/hour zone of Merrigang ends turn right at the Howqua Track, signposted 'Sheepyard Flat'. This is a relatively smooth dirt road but be careful: logging trucks and many recreational campers use this road.

You may need to buy fuel in Mansfield. The Caltex service station north of the town is usually open until 10 pm. Telephone ahead if unsure. Shellite and methylated spirits are also sold there.

● The Bluff

Day one. Start with a quick drive from Sheepyard Flat up to Seven Mile Flat (unless you have camped there). From the camp-site walk along the four-wheel-drive track (not the road), cross Seven Mile Creek and continue towards Eight Mile Flat. Walk up the road to the start of the High Track which will take you east along the Howqua River to Ritches Hut (GR 533832). This section will take about two–three hours.

Collect water here and begin the uphill walk towards the Bluff. The track starts south-east of the horses' yards next to the hut. You are climbing a spur called 14 Mile Spur. The spurs and creeks were named by Fred Fry according to their apparent distance from his hut near Howqua Hills, west of Sheepyard Flat. The spur has many peaks; continue south-east until you reach the junction of several four-wheel-drive tracks (GR 563814). From here, travel east along one of these tracks as it wanders onward to Bluff Hut (about two kilometres). Camp anywhere near this legendary mountain hut and watch the sun setting over Mt Eadley Stoney and the Howqua valley.

Day two. Rise early next morning and take the track from the hut west and uphill to the highest point on the ridge

the walks at a glance

GRADE Moderate

LENGTH One–two days

TYPE Mountain scenery

REGION Victorian Alps

BEST TIME Late spring/summer

SPECIAL POINTS

Carry plenty of water in summer, and carry a fuel stove—no fires.

Be prepared for the vagaries of alpine weather year-round

many other camp-sites further upstream on the Howqua River; they vary in the facilities provided, in privacy and usage. Many will recognise this place as the classic 'High Country' where *The Man from Snowy River* was filmed. An episode of the ABC documentary series 'A River Somewhere' was also set in the vicinity. And this is where Year 9 students from Timbertop walk for about 60 days during their time at the campus.

These walks take in the Bluff, which at 1726 metres is marginally lower than nearby Mt Stirling; and Eagles Peaks, which climb to 1421 metres—a similar height to Lake Mountain, but with a completely different topography and ecology.

● When to go

November–December is probably the best time to visit the area. There may still be some snow lying about, water is plentiful and then and, of course, it is not too hot. Unfortunately, it is also the snake-breeding season. In January–February the alpine flowers are in bloom and the weather, albeit hotter, is more stable.

● Safety

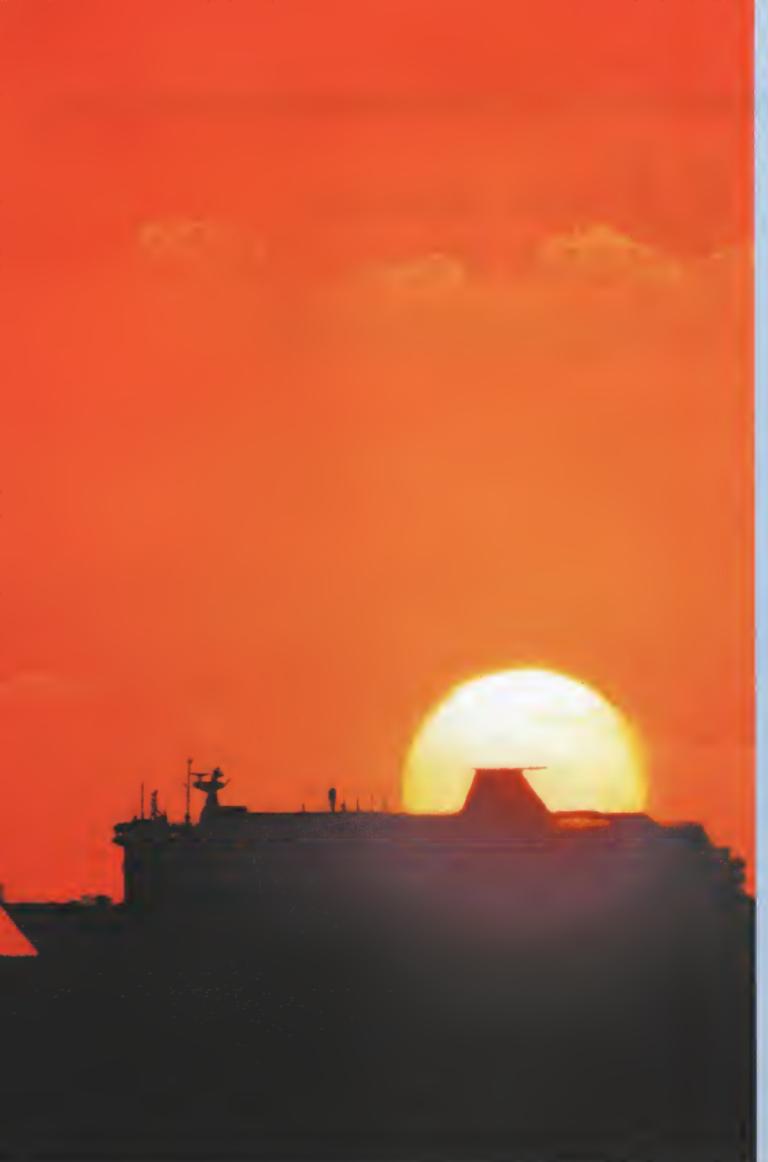
Water is available from the Howqua River; however, there are many visitors since the roads in the area have been improved and you may be wise to purify the water or bring your own. Water can also be found further east in either Seven Mile or Eight Mile Creeks; or in Lickhole Creek when on the Eagles Peaks walk, but it is a good idea

The craggy summit of Eagles Peaks is one of the most appealing in the Victorian Alps. Both photos Glenn van der Knijff

High above the Howqua

Some of north-east Victoria's finest
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